Theology in Story:
A Theology of Life After Death Embedded Within the Old Testament Narratives

By

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THEOLOGY IN STORY:

A THEOLOGY OF LIFE AFTER DEATH EMBEDDED WITHIN THE OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVES

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Steve, without whose love, encouragement and support, could not have been written.

Her husband put his confidence in her,
And lacks no good thing.
Proverbs 31:11

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My thanks to the many patients and families that allowed me, during the course of my long career as a Hospice Nurse, the privilege of sharing in the experience of the death of their loved ones. It was during these moments of death that the idea for this study found life.

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Abstract

I have long been troubled by the prevailing scholarly notion that the ancient Hebrews had little if any defined theology pertaining to the afterlife; that the idea of eternal life was developed rather late in the game. However, one cannot help but ask how the chosen people of the living God could be abandoned by him to an eternal existence in a shadowy grave? If the reality of God's presence is central to biblical faith, how could the eternity of the righteous not exist in it? How does this apparent lack of concern with an afterlife speak to a continuity with the NT and its unmistakable doctrine of eternal life with all of its implications for the church?

The aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate that there is indeed a theology of life after death in the Hebrew Bible embedded within the text. We propose that the concept of an afterlife was written into the biblical narratives and can be identified by reading the text through a theological lens along with relevant literary, socio-anthropological, archaeological and cultural-historical data. This thesis is based on the belief that eternal life in the presence of God, was the sustaining certain hope of the biblical people, just as it is for the church today. As such, this work will operate from the standpoint that both the Old and New Testaments are the authoritative, inspired word of God, and that together, they reveal an overarching theology of life after death.

Chapter One will be introductory, and will provide, descriptions of methodologies, definitions of terms, current trends in research, and identification of the narratives to be discussed.

Chapter Two will provide foundational background information pertaining to anthropological views of the biblical people, thanatologies, burial practices, and *Sheol* using a theological approach; that is to say from the point of view that the biblical people did not separate any part of their lives or deaths from God.

Chapters Three, Four and Five respectively will include the narratives of Rachel as matriarch, Moses as prophet, and David as king. We shall see echoes from their lives in the stories of their deaths, as well as how they intersect with other patriarchal, prophetic and royal death narratives that point to a theology of life after death.

Chapter Six will summarize our conclusions, including contributions, areas for further study, and implications for the church. Current scholarship, which tends to emphasize comparative studies of thanatologies and burial practices, combined with little, if any, theological interpretation of the data, have worked together to muddy the waters toward an understanding of an afterlife in the prose of the historical narratives of the OT. Therefore, a fresh, theologically driven approach, that is informed by literary methods, and a theological interpretation of data, has much to offer scholarship, as it seeks to determine what the ancient Israelites, whose identity rested first and foremost as the people of the living God, believed concerning death and the afterlife.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION i

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ii

ABSTRACT iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS v

ABBREVIATIONS ix

CHAPTER 1 1

1.1 METHODOLOGY 7

1.2 TERMS 13

1.2.1 STORY 13

1.2.2 IMMORTALITY VS. AFTERLIFE 16

1.2.3 PRESENCE 18

1.3 CURRENT TRENDS 19

1.3.1 LITERARY STUDIES 19

1.3.2 RABBINIC SCHOLARSHIP 21

1.3.3 BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES 22

1.3.4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES 23

1.4. CONTRIBUTION 24

CHAPTER 2 26

2.0 INTRODUCTION 26

2.1 BIBLICAL ANTHROPOLOGY 30

2.1.1 ANTHROPOLOGICAL TERMS 32

2.1.1.1 HOLISM 33

2.1.1.2 *BĀŚĀR* 35

2.1.2.3 *RÛAḤ* 36

2.1.2.4 *NᴱŠĀMĀ* 37

2.1.2.5 *NEP̲EŠ* 38

2.2 THANATOLOGIES OF THE ANE 41

2.2.1 MESOPOTAMIAN THANATOLOGY 42

2.2.2 CANAANITE THANATOLOGY 44

2.2.3 EGYPTIAN THANATOLOGY 47

2.3 HEBREW BURIAL PRACTICES 50

2.3.1 JUDAHITE BURIAL PRACTICES 51

2.3.2 CULTS OF THE DEAD AND ANCESTOR WORSHIP 57

2.4 *SHEOL* 61

2.5. SUMMARY 64

CHAPTER 3 67

3.0 INTRODUCTION 67

3.1 FORESHADOWING OF DEATH 68

3.1.1 FIRST FORESHADOWING OF DEATH: GIVE ME CHILDREN OR I SHALL DIE 69

3.1.2 SECOND FORESHADOWING OF DEATH: TAKE AWAY (*'aSAF*) AND ADD (*YaSAP*) 71

3.1.3 THIRD FORESHADOWING OF DEATH: DIRE PREDICTION 74

3.2 ALLUSIONS TO LIFE AFTER DEATH 77

3.2.1 FIRST ALLUSION TO LIFE AFTER DEATH: BARRENNESS, EL SHADDAI, AND PROGENY 77

3.2.2 SECOND ALLUSION TO LIFE AFTER DEATH: LANGUAGE OF DEATH 82

3.2.3 Third Allusion: Pillars of Stone 90

3.3 Summary 98

CHAPTER 4 100

4.0 Introduction 100

4.1 A Theology of Death to Life in the Birth of Moses 102

4.2 A Theology of Death to Life in the Life of Moses 106

4.2.1 The First Words of Moses 107

4.2.2 The Call of Moses 111

4.2.2.1 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob 112

4.2.2.2 *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*: *"I Am That I Am;" "I Am Who I Am;" "I Will Be Who I Will Be"* 115

4.3 A Theology of Death to Life in the Death of Moses 118

4.4 A Posthumous Theology of Death to Life 133

4.5 Summary 136

CHAPTER 5 138

5.0 Introduction 138

5.1 A Theology of Death to Life in the Rise of David 143

5.1.1 A Theology of Death to Life in the Story of David and Goliath 144

5.1.2 A Theology of Death to Life in the Story of David and Abigail 151

5.2 A Theology of Death to Life in the Reign of David 158

5.2.1 A Theology of Death to Life in the Davidic Covenant 158

5.2.2 A Theology of Death to Life in the Story of David and Bathsheba 164

5.3 A Theology of Death to Life in the Death of David 171

5.4 SUMMARY 176

CHAPTER 6 178

6.1 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY 180

6.2 FURTHER AREAS OF STUDY 184

6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH 186

BIBLIOGRAPHY 189

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABC	Anchor Bible Commentary
ASV	American Standard Version
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.* Edited by J. B. Pritchard. Princeton, 1969
ASOR	American Society of Overseas Research
ASTI	*Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*
AYBD	*Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary,* Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vol. New York: Doubleday, 1992
BCE	Before Christian Era
BOSHNP	Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry
c.	circa
CANE	*Civilizations of the Ancient Near East.* Edited by Jack Sasson. 4 vols.
CDWGTHB	*A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and the Hebrew Bible*. 2 vol. J. Strong. Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2009
CCV	Concordia Commentary Volumes
ch(s.)	chapter(s)
CWSDOT	*The Complete Word Study Dictionary Old Testament.* Warren Baker, and Eugene Carpenter, Chattanooga: AMG, 2003
EB	*Encyclopedia Britannica,* http:/britannica.com/topic
EBD	*Eerdmans Bible Dictionary,* Edited by David Noel Freedman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009

e. g.,	for example
EBDBHEL	*Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. F. Brown; S. R. Driver; C. A. Briggs. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977
ed.	edited, edition, editor
ESV	English Standard Version
ff.	*fecerunt*, following
fn.	footnote
gen.	general
HB	Hebrew Bible
HST	*History of the Synoptic Tradition.* R. Bultmann. Oxford: Blackwell, 1968
IA	Iron Age
IB	Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-Greek-English
i. e.	*id est,* that is
impl.	implication
IVPBBCOT	*Inter Varsity Press Biblical Background Commentary of the Old Testament.* John H. Walton, Victor Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas. Downers Grove: IVP, 1997
IVPWBC	Inter Varsity Press Women's Bible Commentary
JPS	*Jewish Publication Society*
JPSTC	Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary
JPSTT	Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation
JRH	*Journal of Religion and Health*
JSNT	*Journal of the Study of the New Testament*
JSOT	*Journal of the Study of the Old Testament*

KJV	King James Version
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LBA	Late Bronze Age
LBI	Library of Biblical Interpretation
LBD	*Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Edited by J. D. Barry; D. Bomar; D. R. Brown; R. Klippenstein; D. Magnum; C. S. Wolcott; and L. Wentz. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016
LHEIB	*Lexham Hebrew-English Interlinear Bible*
LXX	Septuagint
MBA	Middle Bronze Age
MWD	*Merriam-Webster Dictionary.com*, https//www.meriam-webster.com/dictionary
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NDBS	New Daily Bible Study
NET	New English Translation
NIBC	New International Bible Commentary.
NICNT	New International Commentary of the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary of the Old Testament.
NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis.* Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary

NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NSBT	*New Studies in Biblical Theology.* Edited by D. A. Carson. Downers Grove: IVP, 2018
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
p(p.)	page(s)
REB	Revised English Bible
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
STI	*Studies in Theological Interpretation.*
TCB	Theological Commentary on the Bible
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck *et al.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.
TNIV	Today's International Version
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
v(v.)	verse(s)
vol.	volume
WBC	Westminster Bible Companion
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

ZPEB	*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible.* 5 vols. Edited by Merrill C. Tenney. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975
ZTK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no other topic in biblical scholarship attests to a dis-continuity between the Old and New Testaments as that of the doctrine of eternal life. The absence of a clearly articulated theology of life after death in the OT narratives has led biblical scholars to deny its existence. The irony of the OT death narratives is that they are in reality teeming with life. God pronounces the death sentence upon Adam and Eve in Gen 3:19 and in the next verse, Adam names his wife Eve "because she would become the mother of all the living." Genealogies are worded in a manner that symbolizes ongoing life. God opens the dead wombs of Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel, allowing them to give birth to a people who will forever bear his name. Patriarchs are gathered to their fathers and buried by their sons, suggesting an ongoing relationship, as the living God remains the God of them all. Artfully embedded within these colorful stories, lies a theology of death to life; hints that God's plan includes ongoing life after death.

This introductory chapter will set the stage for our proposal of a theology of death to life in the OT stories. An explanation of our methodologies and some NT examples from Jesus, will be followed by a definition of terms, a discussion of current trends, and will conclude with our contribution. Chapter Two will survey foundational background information pertaining to the Israelite and ANE anthropological views, thanatologies and burial practices, as well as an examination of Sheol. We shall be interpreting the data from a theological approach; that is to say from the point of view that the biblical people did not separate any part of their lives or deaths from God as he has revealed himself in the OT texts. Chapters Three, Four and Five respectively

will include the narratives of Rachel as matriarch/patriarch, Moses as prophet, and David as king. We shall see echoes from their lives in the narratives of their deaths, as well as how their stories intersect with other patriarchal, prophetic and royal death narratives in order to contribute to a theology of life after death. Chapter Six will summarize our conclusions, offer suggestions for further study, and state some practical implications of this study for our lives as followers of Jesus Christ.

A fresh approach to the OT stories that is informed by literary methods and a theological interpretation of data has much to offer scholarship as it seeks to determine what the ancient Israelites believed concerning death and the afterlife. This is particularly true in light of the general consensus of many biblical scholars that there is little, if any, clearly defined theology of life after death in the HB, specifically, the Pentateuch and the early prophets.[1] Many scholars feel that perhaps vague allusions to the afterlife are scattered haphazardly in the text, offering glimpses "of an articulate assemblage of thought that never needed to be expressed coherently or systematically."[2] As such, ideas concerning life after death in the OT developed over time in post exilic Israel, and were "understood at a relatively late date…nevertheless there were suggestions of it [that] grew out of a faith that recognized God as the source of life."[3] In this work we will argue that although the ideology associated with a belief in life after death was most certainly

[1] J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press: 1999), 9. The first half of the HB is comprised of "two extensive narrative complexes. The first section is the Pentateuch, including Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The second complex, known as 'The Early Prophets,' includes Joshua, Judges, 1, 2 Samuel, and 1, 2 Kings." This paper will show a theology of death to life embedded within these narrative complexes.

[2] Paolo Xella, "Death and the Afterlife in Canaanite and Hebrew Thought," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol.3*,* ed. J. Sasson (New York: Scribner's, 1995), 2059.

[3] Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 309.

influenced and shaped by the experiences of the biblical people,[4] the concept was there from the beginning, embedded within the story.

Several factors have contributed to the notion that belief in an afterlife is absent in the biblical narratives of the OT, and as such, are worthy of a brief discussion. Those areas include: scholarship that was dominated by higher criticism, comparative studies,[5] the interpretation of archaeological data, and the lack of scholarship regarding literary and poetic aspects of the text.

Until recently, emphasis on higher criticism such as historical and source criticism detracted from the study of the literary structure and aesthetics of the text, which often speak to meaning that proves critical in understanding the death narratives more fully.[6] Influenced by the Enlightenment, many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theologians, disillusioned with traditional ways of interpreting the Bible, turned to grammatical-historic methods that led scholars to understand the Bible in more humanistic terms. Rationalism precluded belief in the supernatural, including divine inspiration of and miracles in the text. It is interesting to note, however, that Jonathan Edwards, in 1739, realized a theology of life after death in the OT stories. He believed that it was always God's design to unite all of his elect, in heaven and earth, together in one body. This action "was begun soon after the fall, and is carried on through all ages, and shall be finished at the end of the world." Beginning with Adam and Eve, he found a theology of eternal life in

[4] Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 180, writes, "My point is not that a full-fledged doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, when it arrives, changes nothing. It changes much. But it also reflects certain key features of the deep structure of the theology of pre-exilic Israel…a theology in which the act of death and the promise of life…stand in a relationship of tension… Indeed, the resurrection of the dead is best seen, not as a solution to a problem [God's vindication]. It is best seen, rather, as another statement of the continuing Jewish need to uphold both the fact of death and the promise of life, while expecting and celebrating the victory of the God who promises life."

[5] This includes the supposition that similarities between biblical practices and those of the surrounding nations are assimilations by the biblical writers and carry much of the same meaning.

[6] Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 10-11.

almost every story. It was somewhat allegorical, but nevertheless he saw it.[7] The rise of the historical critical method in the nineteenth century, ultimately led to an understanding of the OT as historical rather than theological. At this time, the OT was seen as a history of the Israelite religion and not as contributing to biblical theology.[8] The Bible went from being authoritative as the trusted word of God, to fighting for its life under the scrutiny of criticism, and accusations of discrepancies, errors, and inconsistencies.[9] In this scholarly climate, discussions of belief in a resurrection and a theological understanding of an afterlife in the OT fell by the wayside.

Another area that has influenced scholarship in regard to a theology of life after death is that of comparative studies. With its rapidly expanding volume of data, it is most certainly a valuable and necessary component of biblical studies, for in order "to appreciate the worldviews, messages, and artistic qualities of the Bible, one also has to understand its historical and literary context."[10] In the early twentieth century, the ideological differences between secular comparative studies (those who viewed the Bible as a late document containing adaptations of ANE mythology) and confessional studies (those who tended to use the data apologetically), eventually led to a more balanced approach.[11] In his contextual approach to comparative studies, William W. Hallo suggests that scholarship "silhouette the biblical text against its wider literary and cultural

---

[7] Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption: Containing the Outlines of a Body of Divinity, Including a View of Church History, In a Method Entirely New*, updated e-book edition by Paul Lytle, Rosland Press, 2013, Kindle App Edition for iPad. 301.

[8] David Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: The Theological Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010), 44.

[9] That is not to say that all theologians abandoned the Bible as authoritative. However, it did have far reaching consequences. William Emerson, brother of Ralph Waldo Emerson, studied biblical criticism in Germany. When he returned to the U.S. in 1820, his studies had "drained away the faith that inspired him to study divinity." His mother, upon hearing this news, "demanded to know on what authority Eichhorn substituted his 'mutilated gospel' for the Christian gospel of the miracle-working and resurrected Christ,"; Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1900* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 59-60.

[10] Christopher B. Hays. *Hidden Riches: A Sourcebook for the Comparative Study of the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2014), 21.

[11] John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 3-4.

environment."[12] This includes paying attention to differences as well as similarities between biblical texts and those of other ANE nations. Differences often speak to what made the biblical people unique.[13] Emphasis on the differences as well as a theological understanding of the similarities, is particularly important for our purposes when interpreting contextual evidence regarding Israelite burial rituals and death practices. As Matthew J. Suriano aptly observes, comparing and contrasting death practices and descriptions in the HB with those of surrounding ANE cultures is somewhat more helpful than comparing them to NT concepts, but parallels are limited, as "they risk obscuring the cultural distinctiveness of the Levant. The study of death in the Hebrew Bible should be nuanced…in light of its own cultural background."[14] Hallo asserts that "the assessment of a biblical text, so far from ending with the identification of an extra-biblical parallel, begins there."[15]

The analysis of archaeological data pertaining to death practices and beliefs in the biblical world has been greatly influenced by comparative studies. As Theodore J. Lewis notes:

> In addition to the material found in the Hebrew Bible, it is essential to treat the inscriptional material, fragmentary though it may be, as well as comparative material coming from elsewhere in the ancient Near East. This latter corpus is extremely relevant, for it has been used extensively by scholars to reconstruct ancient Israelite beliefs about the dead. In fact, *in some cases, scholars have treated*

[12] William W. Hallo, "Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Their Relevance for Biblical Exegesis" in *Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions and Archival Documents from the Biblical* World, gen. ed. William W. Hallo, assoc. ed. K.L. Younger (Boston: Brill, 2003), 5. This speaks to the issue of why the biblical writers couched their thanatology in prose. Could it be that it was in order to distance the worship of YHWH from the Egyptian fixation with death?

[13] Hays, *Hidden Riches,* 33.

[14] Matthew J. Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 2. Suriano asserts that "the best parallels are found in the mortuary remains of the southern Levant during the first millennium BCE, specifically the tombs of Iron Age Judah." As true as that is, the archaeological data concerning death practices is most often interpreted through parallels with other ANE cultures and not theologically. For example, the analysis of grave goods is often interpreted through the lens of the cults of the dead and ancestor worship, practiced in surrounding cultures, ascribing the same meaning to those of the Israelite grave contents.

[15] Hallo, "Ancient Near Eastern Texts," xxviii.

> *the comparative sources from ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Ugarit as more influential than the biblical texts themselves.*[16] (italics mine)

That is not to say that comparative material is unimportant to biblical studies when analyzing archeological data. However, it is often given priority over approaching the OT narrative theologically on its own terms as the revelation of God in history through story. As Hallo rightly supposes, the horizontal focus (contemporary context) of a text must be understood vertically (interconnectedness) as well, meaning "on a vertical axis between the earlier texts that helped inspire it and the later texts that reacted to it…its intertextual dimension."[17] As helpful as other ancient documents may be as contributors to the understanding of Scripture, the ultimate discernment of the text rests on the authoritative theological claims of the biblical narrative itself.

The HB is written largely in narrative form. As obvious as this may seem, the implications of theological truths embedded in the narrative are often unclear in light of the modern understanding of what composes normative literature. Of all the ancient people, only Israel "has chosen to cast its sacred national traditions in prose."[18] This allowed the biblical writers to present their theology in a way that was totally new and different. It in effect enabled them to present their understanding of God, worship, creation, humanity, and most importantly for us, thanatology in a way that was radically different from that of the surrounding ANE. As such, understanding of the text should not be secondary in importance to the writings of the neighboring nations for determining the beliefs of the biblical people; a unique people, who defined themselves by the

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[16] Theodore J. Lewis, "How Far Can the Text Take Us? Evaluating Textual Sources for Reconstructing Ancient Israelite Beliefs about the Dead" in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, ed. Barry M. Gittlen (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002), 170.

[17] Hallo, "Ancient Near Eastern Texts," xxvi. Lewis, "How Far Can the Text Take Us?" 176 argues "that, while it is theoretically possible to chart ancient Israel's religious beliefs regarding the dead apart from the text, the final product would be so incomplete and so minimalist that it would warp our perception greater than any damage that could be done by having an incomplete picture of a text's redactional history."

[18] Robert Alter, *The Art of the Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1981), 25.

presence of God, that "distinguish[ed] ... [YHWH's] people from all the other people on the face of the earth."[19] Rather, the prose itself should be examined for the theological truths the stories seek to convey.

1.1 Methodology

This study employs a methodology whereby a close reading of an OT story, viewed in a theological light, will illuminate a theology of life after death embedded within the text. In fact, it is a method that we are borrowing from Jesus himself! In order to illustrate our methodology, we will look at three episodes where Jesus, citing OT characters or stories, interpreted the narrative through the lens of the God of the living. He did not allegorize or make analogies. Rather, he found in the story itself a theology of life after death; a truth to be learned about God and his plan for eternal life.

The first instance occurs in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. This parable is unique in that the characters have names and it is the only one with a focus on the afterlife.[20] A wealthy man who lives in the lap of luxury does nothing to help the poor, miserable beggar Lazarus, who daily lies at his gate, hungry and covered with sores. Both men die. Angels transport Lazarus to dwell comforted in Abraham's bosom. The rich man, however, finds himself suffering in Hades.[21] He begs Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his brothers so they will not share the same fate as he. It is here that the parable hints at a theology of an afterlife in the Hebrew narratives.

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[19] Exod 33:16 (TNIV). וְעַמְּךָ מִכָּל־ הָעָם אֲשֶׁר עַל־ פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: פ וְעַמְּךָ מִכָּל־ הָעָם אֲשֶׁר עַל־ פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: פ. "For by what [then] will it be known here that have found grace in Your sight, I and Your people, except You go with us, so we will separate, I and your people from all the people who [are] upon the face of the earth." (Unless specified, literal translations are from *LHELB*).

[20] Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 419. The interpretation of this parable is, in large part, taken from Snodgrass's analysis on pp. 419-35.

[21] Ibid., 431. *Hádēs* is the word the LXX most typically uses to translate *šĕʾôl*.

> "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16:29-31 NIV)

The intention of this parable is not a literal description of life after death. Certainly, the scenario of eschatological reversal such as we see here was known in later Jewish and Greco-Roman literature[22] and Egyptian folklore.[23] What is useful for our purposes is that the rich man's request to warn his brothers so that they could avoid an agonizing afterlife is denied because this information has already been revealed to them in *Moses* and *the Prophets*![24] The rich man wants Lazarus to testify "not only that there is a life after death, but that retribution for one's conduct is part of it."[25] The language of this parable brings to mind Deut 30:11-20,[26] for here it is apparent that the word of God is clear and accessible to all who will listen and heed. Moses declares that "the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it" (v. 14). Keep God's decrees and laws, "then you will live and increase" (v. 16) …"For the LORD is your life" (v. 20). Had the rich man remembered and lived by those words, he too, like Lazarus, would be granted "many years in the land he swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (v. 20).[27] A

[22] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 608.

[23] Robert H. Stein, *Luke: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture,* NAC (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 422.

[24] Ibid., 609, "Abraham thus refuses to grant an apocalyptic revelation of the fate of the dead, insisting that the witness of Moses and the prophets should suffice." And as Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent,* 434, so aptly states, this parable "underscores that the Hebrew Scriptures—not merely the Law, but the Law and the prophets read together—already mark out the will of God."

[25] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV: A New Translation with Commentary,* AB (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 1134.

[26] Ibid., 1128.Fitzmyer notes that Bultmann (*HST,* 203) relates this section of the parable to Deut 30:11-14, where Moses speaks of the lack of difficulty in accessing and observing the law.

[27] As we shall see, the life and death of Moses, the great prophet and friend of God, contains many illusions to eternal life, this being one of them.

theology of life after death, from an OT text is utilized by Jesus in parable form to illustrate that God's people will have life after death.

Jesus' clandestine meeting with Nicodemus in John 3:1-21 provides a second occasion where Jesus finds a theology of life after death in an OT story. In v. 10, Jesus, in response to Nicodemus' confusion over his claim that in order to see the kingdom of God one must be "born of water and the spirit" (vv. 5-8), [28] states: "you are Israel's teacher and do not understand these things." It would seem that Nicodemus' knowledge of the OT should have enabled him to understand what Jesus was alluding to.[29] Jesus then smoothly transitions to the story of Moses and the bronze snake on a pole (Num 21:4-9).[30] The impatient Israelites grumbled against Moses and YHWH. God responded by unleashing a hoard of venomous snakes. The people implored Moses to end the deadly peril by interceding for them.

> "The Lord said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.' So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived" (Num 21:8-9 NIV)

Jesus likens himself to the serpent saying, "Just as Moses lifted up[31] the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal

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[28] A study of the OT implications of "water" and "spirit" for a theology of an afterlife echoed in the Gospel of John is beyond the scope of this work. See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John,* PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 193-96; Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,2008), 137-41; Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 117-25; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I-XII,* AB 29 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981), 139-41; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 83-86; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John 1-10: A Commentary,* vol.1 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers., 2003), 550-555.

[29] Brown, *John I-XII,* 131.

[30] Keener, *John,* vol. 1, 564, notes that: "Although the passage about Moses' serpent does not seem to have been a prominent favorite, early Jewish texts do recall it." He goes on to say that "none of the extrabiblical traditions associated with that passage appear widespread enough for us to consider them as background for this passage." Yet Jesus was clearly familiar with and found a theology of life after death embedded within this story.

[31] For further discussion on the implications of "lifted up," see: Carson, *John* 201-202; Keener, *John,* vol. 1, 563-66; Brown, *John I-XII,* 133.

life in him" (John 3:14-15 NIV). Jesus is challenging Nicodemus "to turn to Jesus for new birth in much the same way as the ancient Israelites were commanded to turn to the bronze snake for new life."[32] The texts pertaining to "water" and "spirit" causing new birth, and the story of the serpent, where, by God's grace, life was granted to those as good as dead, together speak to a theology of an afterlife embedded within the OT narratives.

Our third and perhaps most clear instance where Jesus realizes a theology of an afterlife occurs in Mark 12:18-27.[33] The Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection,[34] attempted to trick Jesus with questions concerning marriage in the afterlife. If the law of Levirate marriage led to a situation where a woman married seven brothers leaving no offspring, whose wife would she be in the resurrection? The Sadducees accepted only the Pentateuch as authoritative Scripture. Thus, Jesus does not attempt to answer them with any of the few texts which definitively speak of an afterlife in the HB; none of which are found in the Pentateuch.[35] Jesus' answer however, is striking: "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?" The Sadducees were silenced, unable to understand Jesus' meaning. What Scriptures in the Torah spoke of the resurrection of the dead? "Now about the dead rising," said Jesus "have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?'[36] He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!" (Mark 12:18-27).

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[32] Carson, *John*, 202.

[33] This same story is reported in Matt 22:23-33; Luke 20:27-28.

[34] David E. Garland, *Mark,* NAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 468 writes "Their [the Sadducees] conservatism led them to reject any theological innovations they regarded as derived from something other than the Pentateuch. The belief in the resurrection fell into that category since the books of Moses never mention it." [brackets mine]. Garland, however, fails to see that Jesus is using this passage purposefully in order to illuminate the fact that there *is* such a belief in the Pentateuch, and here it is!

[35] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark,* NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 470-471. Non-Pentateuchal passages include: Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2; Job 19:25-26; Ps 16:9-11; 49:15; 73:23-26.

[36] Exod 3:6, 15, 16; 4:5.

In the story of Moses and the burning bush (Exod 3:1-4:17) God identifies himself four times as the God of the Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, stressing his covenant relationship with them. In fact, this is the name the people are to call God from generation to generation (3:15), for his covenant extends to them all. "It is this covenant promise to which Jesus seems to allude in his argument, and his point seems to be that God's covenant is meaningless if it is cancelled by death."[37] Jesus reveals quite clearly that relationship with God transcends death, and his foundation for that claim is from the Pentateuch and its covenantal promises.[38]

We have established, using three NT stories, that OT material does indeed contain a theology of ongoing life after death. Jesus cites three Pentateuchal narratives which he claims are normative for just such a theology. With these examples in mind, we will approach the narratives of three foundational biblical characters; Rachel, Moses and David, for it was through the biographies of individual lives that the history of Israel, in historiographical form,[39] was made known. As Eugene Merrill aptly asserts:

> The stories of the OT, i.e., its history are essentially biographies. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Genesis, where the mighty cultures and empires of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian worlds are eclipsed by the poignant and intensely personal accounts of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. To a lesser extent this focus on individuals pervades the remainder of the OT record. Even in the years of the monarchy the attention is not so much on the nations of Israel and Judah…but on kings and prophets.[40]

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[37] Larry Hurtado, *Mark,* NIBC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989), 195-6. Also, France, *Mark,* 472: "its basis [God's identity as God of the ancestors] … is in the fundamental theological understanding of Yahweh, the living God, and of the implications of his establishing an 'everlasting covenant' with his mortal worshippers" [brackets mine].

[38] Mark L. Strauss, *Mark,* ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 535.

[39] Historiographical form refers to the way in which the history of the biblical people was arranged and recorded. It includes the selective telling of historical events. For a discussion on history and/or fiction in the biblical narratives see V. Phillips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 58-78.; Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 23-46.

[40] Eugene H. Merrill, "Old Testament History: A Theological Perspective," in *A Guide to Old Testament Theology and Exegesis: The Introductory Articles from the NIDOTTE,* Willem A. Van Gemeren, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 68. Merrill also calls attention to the fact that in 1, 2 Kgs, the exploits of Elijah and Elisha are recorded in fourteen out of the forty-seven chapters.

Alter has suggested that the unique character development in the HB finds its roots in the concept of monotheism. Humans are created in God's image; however, they can never aspire to actually be him. He alone is the one true God. Thus "the rendering of the biblical characters, are in a sense dictated by the biblical view of man."[41] They are all flawed image bearers, and as such real and relatable, yet valuable to God, who enters into relationship with them in order to make himself known. The biblical authors "betray a pervasive interest in their own past and that of their forbears."[42] Therefore, the stories of the foundational biblical characters such as patriarchs, prophets, and kings, were theologically normative for the biblical people.[43]

We will examine events from the lives of Rachel, Moses, and David. The story of Rachel, as we shall see, contains many allusions to life after death. She was the primary wife of a patriarch and hers was the first recorded death in childbirth in the OT. This is significant, for death in childbirth is the only fatality that ultimately brings forth life. The great prophet Moses, mediator of the Law of Life, experienced an unprecedented death and burial by none other than God himself. David's encounters with Goliath, Abagail, and Bathsheba, the Davidic covenant, and the language used to describe his death, all reflect a theology of life after death.

We will commence our study with a careful reading of each character's story with an eye toward a theology of death to life embedded within the narrative. As we move chronologically

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[41] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* 115.

[42] Merrill, "Old Testament History," 70.

[43] The term "biblical people" will be understood as synonymous with the Hebrew people or Israelites and their ancestors in this work. Francesca Stavrakopoulou. "Ancestor Ideologies and the Territoriality of the Dead in Genesis," in *A Palimpsest: Rhetoric, Ideology, Stylistics, and Language Relating to Persian Israel,* ed. Ehud Ben Zvi, *et al* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009) 61-80. See pp. 73-74, for Stavrakopoulou's interesting discussion of Abraham as "paradigmatic incomer." As such his story is normative for the biblical people. "In Genesis 23, purchased land and ancestral land are held closely together within the same ideological frame. Given his role as the paradigmatic incomer, Abraham's actions in buying Machpelah legitimize the purchase of property by immigrants in the host country. From this perspective, land becomes a commodity available to the incomer—and so implicitly, it can be bought and sold time and time again. But conversely, Machpelah is also imaged as ancestral land, which within the Hebrew Bible is itself idealized as an exclusive and permanent possession, of one descent group. Thus, in the context of Abraham's purchase of Machpelah, the transformation of the land from commodity to ancestral holding ensures the perpetual possession of the incomer's plot, protecting it from resale in the future."

through the text, pertinent socio-anthropological, archeological, and cultural-historical input and analysis will be examined. Poetic devices such as key words, structure, inclusio, repetitions and the like, as well as the use of death language will be assessed. Analysis of the data will be woven into the discussion. In addition, we shall see how their stories intersect with other biblical characters of like roles. For example, Rachel's story shares many literary features with the male patriarchs that speak to a theology of ongoing life after death. Furthermore, pertinent extra-biblical documents will be referenced. A summary of the analysis of our findings will conclude each chapter.

1.2 Terms

In order to approach the text to find a theology of death to life embedded within the story, we must clarify terms, specifically, story, immortality vs. eternal life, and God's presence. These are foundational concepts and contribute to our methodology.

1.2.1 Story

Everyone loves a good story. The same was true for the ancients — and in all likelihood much more so. So important and effective was this mode of communication, that stories comprise one-third of the Bible.[44] However, the biblical story differs from our modern notion of story, thus in order to discern a theology of an afterlife in the OT narratives, it is necessary to define what a biblical story actually is. What was their purpose? How do they differ from our twenty-first century idea of story? Are they fact or fiction? And where did they come from?

[44] Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 1.

Story was the vehicle the OT biblical writers used to present, persuade and educate the people of God about him; his nature, purposes and expectations for obedience, living, and worship.[45] J. P. Fokkelman writes that in a biblical story:

> Much more is going on in the text than the simple message to be read on the surface. A closer look uncovers a great deal of subtlety which itself casts new light on practically all aspects of the story. The text contains many figures and structures which provide frameworks for new discoveries. What we have to learn is to read these stories according to their own rules and conventions.[46]

The uniqueness of the biblical stories lies in the fact that they record the interpretations of God's revelatory acts. They were significant for the Hebrew people in that they were recorded "according to a consistent long-term purpose" and that God "was using the details of human-historical behavior to reveal that purpose."[47] Merrill notes that the OT is the story of God, "designed to communicate clearly the human predicament and how that predicament can be resolved by the (re)establishment of a redemptive, divine, human relationship."[48] In other words, they are first and foremost, theological and their truthfulness is couched in the reality of the historical. When we read a historical fiction novel today, we understand that although the story contains some historical facts, it is essentially fiction. A fictional work is not constrained by the necessity of truth. The reader understands that it does not claim to be historically factual. The biblical stories, on the other hand, are fictionalized history. V. Phillip Long explains that what

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[45] Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 3, also pp. 10-14 for a good brief synopsis of the recent history of poetic analysis of biblical texts. This field of study was largely overshadowed by methods that were more concerned with historical truth in order to reconstruct the history and culture of the Israelites. In other words, the history of the text's composition, writing and circumstances. The aesthetic aspects were largely ignored until the first systematic approaches in the early twentieth century.

[46] Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 18-19.

[47] John N. Oswalt, *The Bible among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 142. Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* 33 similarly writes, "The ancient Hebrew writers…seek through the process of narrative realization to reveal the enactment of God's purposes in historical events."

[48] Merrill, "Old Testament History," 66-67.

constitutes fictionalized history, is "the claim that the story is a representation of a real event in the past, whatever fictionalizing may be involved in the crafting of the narrative."[49] The biblical stories present themselves as narratives that are recounted with accuracy and integrity, not necessarily "unfiltered and without nuance," but that the facts "conform to reality; i.e., that they are 'true facts.'"[50]

Therefore, fiction has two senses; that of genre, such as the historical fiction novel, and that of fiction as artistry, that includes the nuancing of historical truth to convey meaning. As Merrill observes:

> If the OT is anything, it is a story or collection of stories with discernible characters, plots, themes, crises, resolutions, and other elements familiar to this kind of literature. But specifically, it is a story in the service of history...a narrated history. When this understanding of OT history is applied to the matter of the relationship of history to theology, it becomes clear that the OT is narrated or "historicized" theology.[51]

The biblical narratives are skillfully and artfully written, using a careful, efficient selection of words, details, pace, dialogue, structure and more, that when read closely, reveal God and his purposes.[52]

[49] Long, *Art of Biblical History*, 62; see also pp. 128-35 on "divine intervention" of the text.
[50] Merrill, "Old Testament History," 67.
[51] Ibid., 66.
[52] A NT example of the practice of artful arrangement is found in the story of the feeding of the five thousand which is recorded in all four gospels. In Matt 14, Mark 6, and John 6, the story is followed by the account of Jesus walking on water. However, Luke 9 does not record the walking on water story in his Gospel. Rather, he follows the feeding with Peter's confession of faith. The arrangement and placement of this true story are written in such a way so as to effectively communicate the message the evangelist is attempting to convey.

1.2.2 Immortality vs. Afterlife

The understanding of what is meant by immortality in the HB must be differentiated from the concept of life after death.[53] An immortal human is one who never experiences death.[54] Adam and Eve were immortal before their disobedience and expulsion from the Garden of Eden with its access to the tree of life.[55] Enoch (Gen 5:22, 24) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2) are the only two immortals in the HB. Robin Routledge argues that the translation of Enoch is "given no theological significance in the OT" and that of Elijah "is not linked with the future destination of the righteous."[56] However, one would have to question why these two narratives are included in a document that is economically and succinctly worded and structured? There are several literary hints in the text that allude to the importance of these events, including the presence of a theology of life after death. Enoch was the father of Methuselah, the first man born after the death of Adam as well as the oldest living man. Twice Enoch is said to have *walked faithfully with God* (וַיִּתְהַלֶּךְ חֲנוֹךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים) (Gen 5:22, 24). His translation is strategically placed within the genealogy from Adam, with whom *God walked* (וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת־קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִתְהַלֵּךְ בַּגָּן) until sin entered the garden, to the righteous Noah, who also *walked faithfully with God* (הִתְהַלֶּךְ לְפָנַי וֶהְיֵה תָמִים׃) (Gen 6:9). God's walking with Adam and Eve in their immortal state, and Enoch, who did not die and who's genealogy contains allusions to ongoing life, is "expressive of immortality." In Noah's story,

[53] "Life after death" and "eternal life" will be understood as synonymous in this work.

[54] Levenson, *Resurrection*, 20-22, who defines immortality as "the state of those who have died and await their restoration into embodiment, that is into full human existence," (21). Resurrection from the dead, in this case, implies restoration, and therefore, one must experience death to achieve it.

[55] James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 4. Barr argues that the story of the sin of Adam and Eve "is a story of how human immortality was almost gained, but lost. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden… because if they stayed there, they would gain access to the tree of life…and gain immortality."

[56] Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 306; also, Paul R. Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife: Biblical Perspectives on Ultimate Questions,* NSBT (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018), 165; Philip S. Johnson, *Shades of Sheol: Death and the Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 199-200.

walking with "God re-envisions immortality with death as no obstacle in receiving life after death eternally."[57]

Elijah abruptly appears in the biblical narrative in 2 Kgs 17. He prophesies the drought that is to befall Israel. His first two actions include snatching the widow of Zarephath and her son from the jaws of death by starvation, followed by his successful petition to God, after the boy dies to "let this boy's life (*nephesh*) return to him" (2 Kgs 17:21). From the beginning the Elijah story imagines a theology of death to life. [58] The obvious answer as to why these stories are included in Scripture is that the reader is prompted to ask: Where then are Enoch and Elijah? Certainly, the context of both characters is full of life allusions. Would not such esteemed, foundational figures be seen as paradigmatic for eternal life considering their artful place in the narrative, for where else could Enoch and Elijah be but with God?

In Gen 4, immediately after Adam and Eve were banished from the garden, Eve became pregnant. Thus, "immortality was [is] replaced by progeny."[59] As Suriano notes, "The dead continued to exist through their offspring, and the more children, the greater the possibility for a lasting legacy."[60] As such, the production of offspring, provided a sort of functional immortality achieved through being remembered.[61] Progeny insured the life of the family name and ultimately the life of the people of God. According to Levenson, "Since the family carries on after the death of one of its members…the form of survival to which the biblical pattern best corresponds is immortality: the core of indestructible self is simply embedded in a larger unit and thus survives

[57] Our thanks to Dr. H. Douglas Buckwalter who noted this theology of eternal life in the story of Enoch. Quotations are his.

[58] Robert Alter, *Ancient Israel: The Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), 697: "It is obviously Elijah, not Moses or Isaiah, who establishes the template for many of the stories about Jesus in the Gospels."

[59] Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 94.

[60] Suriano, *History of Death*, 7.

[61] Suriano, *History of Death*, 9-10, who writes, "Death is idealized through themes of succession and inheritance. As such death is relational, since Abraham's fate is tied to that of his descendants."

with that unit, even after the individual subject has indeed and indubitably perished."[62] The foundational stories of immortal individuals, as well as the functional immortality embodied in the concept of name and progeny "play important roles in a wider network of afterlife beliefs, even if the connections are not always obvious."[63] As we shall see, the concept of functional immortality serves as a concrete representation or metaphorical expression of a belief in an afterlife.

1.2.3 Presence

The final term that warrants defining is that of "presence." The topic of the presence of God is far too vast for this study, but a brief mention is called for, as this study presupposes an understanding of a theology of life after death in the OT text based on the relationship of God to his people. He is the living God whose presence was the most defining marker of the biblical people. It set them apart from all of the surrounding nations and was the driving force behind the text, and as such, in its interpretation. Gordon Fee supposes, "whatever else, the [OT] people of Israel understood themselves to be the people of the Presence, the people among whom the eternal God had chosen to dwell on earth."[64]

God's presence is at the root of every story. Interactions with God in biblical stories are, as Samuel Terrien notes, "presented as normal happenings of daily existence, although they always succeed in preserving, by the use of some rhetorical or semantic device, the mystery of divine transcendence."[65] Moreover, the promises of the future bestowed upon the ancestors during divine encounters were more than a revelation to the fathers. They were understood to pertain to future generations as well. In other words, God's presence and encounters with the foundational biblical

[62] Levenson, *Resurrection*, 119.
[63] Suriano, *History of Death*, 7.
[64] Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 10.
[65] Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1987), 70. Terrien presents an interesting and thorough treatment of the divine presence and how it relates to the NT.

people allowed for an eschatological faith that included relationship and on-going life.[66] The Bible presents itself as the revelation of the one, true, living God who has chosen to dwell with his people. It stands to reason, that any interpretation of it should begin with him.

1.3 Current Trends

It is well established that biblical scholarship, for the most part, denies a theology of an afterlife in the OT.[67] However, there are some recent works that create space for such a theology. Despite the fact that these contributions often do not interpret the text theologically, they do offer some valuable insight into our proposal. Areas included are: literary studies, rabbinic scholarship, and biblical and archaeological perspectives.

1.3.1 Literary Studies

In our defining of the term "biblical story" we alluded to the fact that the OT stories are normative for theology. In order to determine a theology of death to life in the story, a literary reading from a theological standpoint is required. The text should be read carefully, with an eye toward the poetics and structure of the narratives. Robert Alter's ground breaking work on literary analysis, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981) argues that as invaluable as the vast amount of biblical scholarship generated by textual and historical criticism may be, he "would prefer to insist on a complete interfusion of literary art with theological, moral, or historiosophical vision, the fullest perception of the latter dependent of the fullest grasp of the former." (19) Chapter Two of his book

[66] Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 65-66, writes, "As the fathers knew their God, so also the sons could in some way duplicate, imitate, or stimulate in themselves a receptiveness to the renewal of divine entrance into their history."

[67] Heinz-Josef Fabry, "śêb̲â: Age and Esteem" in *TDOT,* vol. 14, ed. G Johannes Botterweck *et al.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 82, "Because no one expected any form of life after death, all hoped that Yahweh would grant them a full life span in the here and now." "Death is the end of everything" (83). See also Xella, "Death and the Afterlife," 2059-2070; Suriano, *History of Death*, 3-11.

offers an informative understanding of sacred history written as prose in the HB and the cultural significance of this practice for understanding the worldview of the biblical people as it differed from the surrounding ANE nations. This is particularly pertinent to our study. Alter concludes that understanding how a story is told brings one closer to its intended meaning. (179)

Yairah Amit writes in *Reading Biblical Narratives* (2001) that the study of literary criticism is a recent development in biblical studies; the longstanding "deliberately historical approach, inevitably meant ignoring the aesthetic aspects of the text" (11). She advocates for a combination of all aspects of biblical criticism, applying them, when necessary, along with literary criticism (25) in order to understand the full meaning of the text.

In his work, *Reading Biblical Narrative* (1999), J. P. Fokkelman asserts that close reading of a biblical text "uncovers a great deal of subtlety which itself casts new light on practically all aspects of the story" (18). The mastery of the form with which the story is written can seem deceptively simple. God is, at times, the most influential when he is invisible "and even in the silence around the center of the story, the unexpressed, is inspired" (15).

David Dorsey's commentary *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* (1999),[68] pays special attention to the way in which biblical writers organized their works, and how that structure speaks to the meaning of the text. Dorsey finds three primary ways meaning is conveyed in the text: (1) the overall structure of the composition, (2) structured repetition, and (3) positions of prominence (36). Stories, that to our "western" eyes may seem haphazard, are actually artfully arranged to be normative.

All four of these works pertaining to literary studies contain helpful information concerning the poetics of the biblical texts and their importance for determining theological meaning.

[68] David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999).

Increased awareness and scholarship in this area of biblical studies has provided a critical and much needed avenue for discovering a theology of life after death in the OT.

1.3.2 Rabbinic Scholarship[69]

Jon Levenson's revolutionary work, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel* (1985) argues that contrary to widespread belief, the ancient rabbis discerned the doctrine of resurrection in the HB. In chapter two, Levenson explores resurrection in the Torah. He argues that the Exodus event became a "prototype of ultimate redemption…a token, perhaps *the* token, of things to come" (27).[70] However, he goes on to say that the rabbinic effort to find allusions to life after death "founders on the plain sense of the verses in question" and "the forced nature of the exegeses in question testifies to the gap between the religious culture of the rabbis…and their scriptural sources, on the other" (33).[71] Levenson also observes that though the rabbinic assertions are not valid, the hope of a resurrection has more "continuities with their predecessor's thinking than has heretofore been recognized" (34). This was in large part a reflection of the belief that resurrection theology was closely connected to the restoration of Israel.[72] It was the high status of the written Torah that spurred the rabbis to seek a theology of an afterlife there. "To them it was inconceivable that something as central to the relationship of God to humanity as resurrection would have been

[69] A full discussion of this area is well beyond the scope of this study. For a brief overview of Midrash, see S. R. Moore "Midrash" in *LBD*, eds. J. D. Barry *et al.* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016); L.L. Lyke, "Midrash" in *EBD*, eds. D. N. Freedman *et al.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Gary G. Porton, "Midrash" in *AYBD*, vol. 4, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

[70] Italics his. See Chapter 5, "Intimations of Immortality" in Levenson, *Resurrection*, for further illustrations.

[71] "Peshaṭ." EB, December 9, 2010. https://www.britannica.com/topic/peshat, "In the scribal and rabbinic tradition, two forms of exposition were early distinguished—peshaṭ, "plain meaning," and derash, "interpretation," by which religious or social morals were derived, often artificially, from the text. There was, however, no sense of conflict between the two…During the early scribal and rabbinical period (c. 4th century BC-c. 2nd century AD), peshaṭ was preferred." Levenson, *Resurrection*, 108, argues that the method by which the rabbis exegeted the Scriptures was *derash* as opposed to *peshaṭ* and that "ingenious *derash*" is the only means by which a theology of life after death may be found in the Torah.

[72] Levenson, *Resurrection*, 229 writes, "The expectation of resurrection in Judaism had likewise always been inseparable from the restoration of the ever-dying, ever-reviving people who are the Jews."

unknown to Moses" (219). Levenson cites a line from *Midrash*, Sifre Deuteronomy 32 (the account of the song of Moses): "No passage lacks the resurrection of the dead, but we lack the capacity to interpret properly" (23). We agree with the ancient rabbis that there is a theology of an afterlife in the OT, for as we noted in our methodology, Rabbi Jesus certainly saw it there, embedded within the story. Levenson's work approaches the issue of the presence of a theology of life after death in the Torah from a somewhat different point of view from this study; his from the rabbinic literature as it relates to a theology of eternal life closely tied to the fate of Israel, and ours of theology in the story. Behind both methods stands the belief in the living God, who has communicated through his words, for his people, a theology of life after death in the OT for those who long to see it.

1.3.3 Biblical Perspectives

In his work, *Death and the Afterlife* (2018), Paul R. Williamson argues that "God's revelation concerning personal eschatology was revealed progressively over time" (22) and that the OT is virtually silent in regard to "afterlife in general and personal resurrection in particular" (74). As such he finds disparity between the Testament's perspective of the idea of a personal eschatology. We will argue that although the idea of an afterlife was presented differently in the two Testaments, eternity in the presence of God is the premise of both. That being said, Williamson does see the idea of an afterlife as springing from total confidence in the sovereignty and power of God, that was "nurtured by the crises they [Israel] faced" (81), brackets mine. However, he draws his argument primarily from later texts (Ezek 37; Dan 12; Isa 25, 26, 53) and disregards what he refers to as "incipient" resurrection hope in the songs of Moses (Deut 32:39) and Hannah (1 Sam 2:6), and the stories of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kgs 17:17-24; 2 Kgs 4:18-37; 13:20-21) (76-81). He fails to see the theology of an afterlife as embedded in the stories and how they are each part of the

larger story. Williamson surveys an area of biblical anthropology[73] that is helpful for our purposes. Contrary to the NT dualistic (body/soul) view of mankind, the OT envisions the person holistically. On the basis of this foundation, many theologians conclude that when a person's *nepês* or life force (which we might call soul) or *rûaḥ* (spirit) leaves the body at death, the whole person is dead. Williamson points out that this view has been challenged of late by such theologians as James Barr, R. C. Steiner and J. W. Cooper, who contrast the traditional view of ontological holism ("humans are 'indissoluble unites' and thus deny any idea of a disembodied existence after death") with functional holism (which does not assume "that each part would necessarily cease to function… if the whole were broken up" (36). As such holistic anthropology does not preclude the possibility of ongoing life after death.

1.3.4 Archaeological Perspectives

Matthew Suriano, in his insightful work *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible* (2018), proposes that understanding the concept of death as relational provides several avenues for analysis and insight in regard to the biblical treatment of the dead and their post mortem existence; in particular the Judahite practice of collective burial in a rock cut bench tomb (10). We will look more closely into his observations, as well as the work of other scholars, later in our study.[74] Briefly, Suriano applies ritual theory[75] to the mortuary "process that spanned both time (from primary to secondary

[73]We will be covering this subject in more detail in Chapter Two.

[74] Other informative works in the area of archeology and mortuary practices in ancient Israel include: Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead,* JSOT/ASOR 7, 123 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); Rachel S. Hallote, *Death, Burial and Afterlife in the Biblical World: How the Israelites and Their Neighbors Treated the Dead* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001); Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Winona Lake: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994); Jon Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[75] See Sarah Elizabeth Bollinger, "Ritual Manipulation of Women's Hair in the Hebrew Bible" (PhD. Dissertation, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2018), 21-35 for a discussion of ritual theory and its application to the study of women's hair rituals.

burial) and space (bench to repository)" within the bench tomb (50). These practices served to keep the dead in relationship with the living in the liminal period during which a person transitioned from corpse to ancestor. The rock cut tomb imitated features of the Israelite four room house and "turned the burial place into a distinct symbol of the Judahite family and, hence, of the Judahite ancestral ideal" (96). Although Suriano's work does not come from a theological point of view, his understanding of the relational aspect of death is helpful for our study. For example, if the tomb is a liminal, transitional house that allows the dead to be in community with the living on earth, a theological understanding will take that finding one step further—the dead have transitioned to the house of God.

1.4. Contribution

It was the relationship of the biblical people with their God, his presence in their lives and deaths, that defined how they lived and how they understood death. Thus, when one approaches these sacred stories, the favorite genre of the biblical people,[76] it is important to remember, as Long notes, that the manner in which the story was written "often becomes the avenue of greater insight into the theological, religious and even historical significance of the text — *what* the story means."[77] Equally as important to keep in mind is that there was no separation in the minds of the biblical people between God and every aspect of their lives. Their "religion pervaded every activity of daily life in the world of the Bible."[78]

Despite the fact that the OT stories are theocentric, God chooses to tell his story through the lives of his people. Rarely do we find a story about God. Nevertheless, he is the principal

[76]Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel, 1250-587 BCE* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), xix.

[77] Long, *Art of Biblical History*, 43 (italics his).

[78] Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel,* xix.

character and we learn about him through the observation of events in the lives of his people. Therefore, we will be looking at the narratives primarily from a theological standpoint, while concurrently acknowledging the importance and enrichment gleaned from other areas of study. The scholarly conversation concerning the presence of a theology of eternal life after death in the OT is sorely in need of a theological voice. It is our desire to contribute meaningfully to that dialogue.

The aim of this study is to answer the question: Is there a theology of an afterlife, embedded within the narratives of the HB, that contributes to the church's understanding of "story" as part of God's ongoing revelation of his plan for eternal life? An embedded theology of death to life in the OT not only contributes to the continuity of the Testaments, it illustrates that eternal life for his people was always God's intent. The hope of the evangelical church today is that death in this life will be followed by eternal life in the presence of the living God in the next.

Chapter 2
DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE: ANE BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

2.0 Introduction

A theological interpretation of the text must include an understanding of the complex circumstances from which it arose. This chapter will explore anthropological, socio-cultural, and archaeological background material that is pertinent to our study. The manner in which the biblical people viewed themselves, both individually — in an anthropological sense — and as a community that comprised the people of God, differed significantly from our modern understanding of what it means to be a human being. We shall see that their worldview concerning their identity influenced their thanatology as they engaged with and reacted to the surrounding ANE cultures.

The stories of the biblical characters did not take place in a cultural bubble. The patriarchs wandered in and out of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Canaan.[1] Jacob, along with his offspring, livestock and possessions, traveled from Canaan to Egypt (Gen 46:6). There, in the fertile Nile delta, they multiplied from a band of seventy (Gen 46:27) to a population so large that the Egyptians enslaved them out of fear that they would join their enemies in a war (Exod 1:6-10). Moses was raised as an Egyptian royal in the court of the mighty Pharoah (Exod 2:10). The nation of Israel was forged in the midst of many Canaanite people groups (Exod 3:17) — not to mention frequent contact with Egypt and Mesopotamia. Therefore, it is not surprising that the writers of the HB sought to disengage themselves from the dangerous potential for syncretism posed by the

[1]This was true of all the Patriarchs and their wives with the exception of Isaac, who, as far as we know, never ventured out of Canaan. Isaac also differs from Abraham and Jacob in that he was monogamous, and does not receive a name change (most likely because God names him prior to his birth in Gen 17:19).

cult and epics of the surrounding nations. This effort to distance themselves was manifested in the unique creation narratives of the Israelites, as well as beliefs concerning death and the afterlife, for, generally speaking, a culture's death practices and beliefs are a direct reflection of their creation stories.[2]

A striking difference between the literature of Israel and that of the surrounding ANE is how rarely the biblical text speaks of death and or the afterlife. Death is not a theme in any book. Rather we find minimal, nonspecific allusions in many contexts. Pitard notes of OT passages dealing with death:

> These passages are not particularly harmonious in their views, with some passages seeming to presuppose that the dead carry on an active existence, while others present a very skeptical view of the afterlife, and some suggest that the afterlife does not exist at all…The relative silence on the part of the Hebrew Bible cannot be attributed merely to chance. The Hebrew Bible represents a carefully chosen collection of books that were understood…to be theologically sufficient, containing what was essential for the community. Thus, the absence of texts dealing in any detail with the issue of death seems to have been a deliberate choice by the post-exilic religious leadership of Judah. This apparent lack of concern for the religious dimensions of death and for speculation about the afterlife (which, after all, is a subject of enormous intrinsic interest) is intriguing and calls for explanation.[3]

We propose that the intentional lack of treatment concerning the issues of death and the afterlife in the HB is a theological one.[4] Jacob Milgrom argues that "the Hebrew religion defines itself on the opposition of life and death; the false gods of the pagan nations have no life; the God of the Bible overcomes the power of death."[5] The method of revealing God's purposes in story

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[2]Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth*, 68.

[3]Wayne T. Pitard, "Tombs and Offerings: Archaeological Data and Comparative Methodology in the Study of Death in Israel," in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, ed. Barry M. Gittlen (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002), 146.

[4] A theological approach recognizes that the HB is first and foremost the authoritative record of God's revelation of himself to us in history, and as such seeks to interpret it on the basis of those self-proclaimed terms.

[5] Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* **(**New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 100. Douglas presents Milgrom's view as it pertains to the cults of the dead and their repudiation in the book of Leviticus. For other possible theories, see pp. 99-104.

allowed the biblical writers to embed a theology of death to life in the text that emphasizes life. Rather than attempting to interpret the Bible's seeming disinterest in death through the lens of Ugaritic and other non-Israelite sources, one should respect the biblical text as characteristic of the cult of YHWH, whose focus is on the living and their relationship to the living God in history.[6] The people of the living God were not to be fixated on death. Instead, they were to live in righteous community with each other and the land, in the divine presence of God. We will argue below that death did not terminate those relationships. Rather, it was a kind of continuation of them.

A brief study of the thanatologies of the Mesopotamian, Canaanite, Egyptian, and Israelite cultures will follow. Comparative studies of the death practices and the beliefs surrounding death in Israel, often assume that the biblical people borrowed from and participated in rituals in the same way as their neighboring ANE cultures.[7] However, according to Bloch-Smith this assumption is changing. Current scholars are reacting to the excess emphasis on similarities when interpreting data, leading to a re-evaluation of the usefulness of comparative studies. They are instead, "seeking to [re]establish unique features of early Israel."[8] Furthermore, rather than assuming that Israelite death practices which appear to be similar to those of other ANE cultures

[6] Levenson, *Resurrection,* 65. God is distinguished by the fact that he is alive as opposed to non-living or a dead idol

[7] For example, Xella, "Death and the Afterlife," 2060-62 writes: "It is the Ugaritic documentation of the Late Bronze Age that adds material of the first order, both for a study of mythology and religious life and for ideas about death and the afterlife in this cultural context. In spite of its small size and relatively limited political importance, the ancient kingdom of Ugarit handed down a combination of widespread beliefs, myths, and rites from early antiquity and can, therefore, be considered representative of the religious situation of the whole geographical area. This evaluation is supported by a whole series of signs that allow us to go back and recover motives, persons, and ideas known to the Ugaritic world and compare them with later manifestations of Syro-Palestine, including the Hebrew Bible." To conclude that the beliefs concerning death and the afterlife of an entire multi-cultural, multi-cultic geographical area, based on an earlier, small, civilization of limited importance is highly speculative, especially in light of the fact that according to Xella, "death was one of the principle ideological interests" of the Ugaritic society. The series of signs Xella puts forth to make his case include ancestor worship of dead kings and famous soldiers, and the characteristics of *Ba'al* and *Mot*. Xella's conclusions are contra Pitard, "Tombs and Offerings, 147, who argues, "Much of the Ugaritic material has proved more ambiguous and impenetrable than earlier thought…we simply do not yet have a firm grasp of what the actual situation in that culture was."

[8] Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, "Death in the Life of Ancient Israel," in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, ed. Barry M. Gittlen (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002), 142.

had the same meaning for the biblical people, we will view them theologically, in light of the differences that made them distinctly unique.

The interpretation of archaeological data pertaining to Israelite burial practices has been largely understood from a comparative point of view. As important as archaeological data is, a theological interpretation of it in regard to a theology of death to life, must find its foundation in the biblical text. Pitard suggests that archaeological finds actually tell us quite little about the actual beliefs concerning life after death of those who left them, largely due to the fact that they are wide open to many possible interpretations. "Without some kind of written data, it is very difficult to say with any certainty what a specific group of people meant when they did things the way they did."[9] Lewis argues:

> While it is theoretically possible to chart ancient Israel's religious beliefs regarding the dead apart from the text, the final product would be so incomplete and so minimalist that it would warp our perception greater than any damage that could be done by having an incomplete picture of a text's redactional history. Miller's comment is astute: "The important question is not whether we should use the Hebrew Bible . . . but how we should use it" (Miller 1991: 101). Hallo (1990), in correctly challenging the limits of our skepticism, argues for a critical sifting of each fragmentary bit of the limited evidence we have so that we can make valid inferences from the text. And here the details may be far more devilish.[10]

In this study, we will examine the archaeological data theologically, using the biblical text to illuminate understanding of Israelite burial practices and remains.

Finally, we will conclude this chapter with a survey of Sheol in the HB. Despite the fact that the concept of an underworld was widespread in the ANE, the term *Sheol* is unique to the

[9] Pitard, "Tombs and Offerings," 149.

[10]Theodore J Lewis, "How Far Can the Text Take Us? Evaluating Textual Sources for Reconstructing Ancient Israelite Beliefs About the Dead" in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of* Israel, ed. Barry M. Gittlen (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002), 176.

Hebrews.[11] As such, the biblical writers were able to infuse the term with a uniquely theological outlook,[12] thereby creating space for discerning a theology of death to life.

2.1 Biblical Anthropology

The biblical people lived in a communal world.[13] It was group oriented, for the survival of an individual depended upon their household, clan, village, tribe and nation and their place and function within them.[14] The language of the death narratives of the HB reflects this belief, therefore we will look at the communal aspect of biblical anthropology in surveying the Israelite burial practices.

The manner in which the biblical people viewed themselves as human beings was far removed from our modern anthropological conception. Thus, scholars dealing with anthropological issues concerning death and the afterlife from a biblical perspective must look at the data through a theological lens informed by an understanding of Hebraic anthropology and how it related to thanatological beliefs and practices.

It is well established that Hebrew anthropology is holistic.[15] Rather than understanding human beings as dualistic,[16] comprised of a body and a soul that survives death, the biblical people

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[11] Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought,* 302.

[12] Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and the Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 79.

[13] Jan Dietrich, "Human Relationality and Sociality in Ancient Israel: Mapping the Social Anthropology of the Old Testament," in *What is Human? Theological Encounters with Anthropology,* ed. Eve-Marie Becker *et al*. (Bristol: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 23-24, writes "The human being, particularly in the Old Testament, has always been a creature in relations with other creatures and can only be understood based on this relatedness and its special forms. It is the human being's relatedness to God, to the world, to oneself, to fellow human beings, and to animals and plants that is reflected in the stories and metaphors of the Old Testament. The human being of the Old Testament is not simply a part of a collective personality — as scholars have long postulated — nor an individual in the modern sense of having to hone and demonstrate one's own uniqueness; instead, he is a relational creature that should be understood from the perspective of its relatedness in its various historical and cultural forms. Consequently, the social anthropology of the Old Testament examines the Old Testament human being as a relational creature in its structures of relationships.

[14] Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, xvii-xviii.

[15] Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife*, 34; also see John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting* (Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 2000), Kindle ed., ch. 2, IIC.

[16] Ibid.„ ch. 2, IA.

saw themselves as whole beings. Scholarship has, for the most part, understood holism as monistic — meaning the parts of a human function together as one indissoluble whole[17] that is either dead or alive, thereby precluding the possibility of an afterlife.[18] However, we propose a theological understanding and analysis of holism, with an eye toward holism as functional rather than monistic, does indeed allow for the possibility of an afterlife.

In addition, the biblical people, rather than viewing something from the standpoint of how it looked or was, perceived things according to what they did, that is, how they functioned.[19] In the ancient world, abstract concepts were largely communicated concretely through the metaphorical[20] or symbolic use of the names of human body parts and their essential functions.[21] Hans W. Wolff illustrates this idea in Isa 52:7:

> How beautiful upon the mountains
> Are the feet of him who brings good tidings,

[17] Barr, *Garden of Eden,* 36; Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting,* ch. 1, VIII, who notes: "Biblical scholars have subjected anthropological terms and texts to careful analysis and have concluded that the biblical view of human nature is not dualistic at all, but is quite emphatically holistic."

[18] R. Martin-Achard, "Resurrection: Old Testament" in *AYBD 5,* ed. D. N. Freedman, trans. T. Prendergast (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 683. "If the problem of the Israelite's survival beyond his or her earthly existence was scarcely asked about in Israel over the centuries, this was due in the first instance to the traditional anthropological conceptions by the people of YHWH: the human being was composed of body and soul (or breath [Gen 2:7–8]), that formed the organic unity indispensable for life; the person was not constituted of a perishable element (the flesh) and of an immaterial reality endowed with immortality (the soul). Life ceased at that very moment when the breath loaned by God was taken back (Ps 104:29–30; Qoh 12:7) and the body, henceforth inanimate, was destined to return to the earth (Gen 3:19; Ps 90:3)."

[19] Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, xv.

[20] Carolyn Leeb, "Translating the Hebrew Body into English Metaphor" in *Social Sciences and Biblical Translation*, ed. Dietnar Neufeld (Atlanta: SBL, 2007), 109-126. Leeb notes that "For the ancient world, the locus of interior experience, rather than its quality was determinative in evaluating it. They made little distinction between the perception, realization, or knowledge of a situation and what we would call the emotions associated with that experience" (109). See her work for an interesting study concerning the way in which human responses are embodied, or as she states it, "symbolized by reference to the human body."

[21] A rather pithy example of this occurs six times in the HB (1 Sam 25:22, 34; 1 Kgs 16:11, 21:21; 2 Kgs 9:8). Males of a family or household that were doomed to be exterminated were referred to as *those who urinate against the wall* (IB) (עַד־ הַבֹּקֵר מַשְׁתִּין בְּקִיר). It is interesting to note that the KJV translates the verse literally (*him that pisseth against the wall*) and the NIV, NASB, NET, JPS and NLT all use the word *males*.

> It is not the graceful form of the feet that he means, but their swift movement: 'How beautiful it is that the messenger is hurrying over the mountains!' Feet, says the Hebrew, but he is thinking of the approach by leaps and bounds.[22]

OT anthropology typically focuses upon Hebrew terms for human beings and their body parts.

2.1.1 Anthropological Terms

We shall examine five anthropological terms that contain important concepts for determining a theology of death to life. They include the concept of holism and four Hebrew terms for body parts: *bāśār* (flesh/body); *rûaḥ* (breath/spirit); *n^{e}šāmā* (breath of life); and *nepeš (*soul/person).[23]

It is important to note that at times the meanings of the Hebrew terms overlap and that each carries a range of meanings and nuances that are determined by their context. This interchangeability of terms points toward holism (as opposed to dualism). Cooper argues:

> There is no systematic distinction between physical and spiritual organs whatsoever. Feeling, knowing, thinking, willing, loving, recognizing moral demands, keeping commitments, as well as praising and praying — the entire roster of higher human capacities — are sometimes attributed to the "spiritual" organs *nepeš* and *rûaḥ*. But at least as often attributed to the heart.[24]

The fluidity of function between the anthropological and emotional/spiritual aspects of the human being works to form a whole functional entity. Therefore, the OT portrays humankind as an integrated whole made up of the material and the spiritual. The material man Adam was not alive until he was spiritually animated by God's breath. At that time, he became a whole, living

[22] Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 8.

[23] See Wolff, *Anthropology,* 7-79 for a thorough study of Hebrew anthropological terms.

[24] Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*, ch. 2, IIC; also see Wolff, *Anthropology,* ch. VII, "The Inner Parts of the Body," for a discussion of the cavity that contains the inner parts (*qereb*), the liver (*kābēd),* and kidneys (*k^{e}lāyōt*) as anthropological terms that connote emotional or spiritual meaning.

human being (Gen 2:7). The anthropological beginning of man must be considered when attempting to understand what the biblical people believed about human death.

2.1.1.1 Holism

As stated above, OT scholarship pertaining to biblical anthropology has operated from the monistic holistic understanding of man, as opposed to the later NT Greek dualistic, body/soul conception. The monistic holistic view of human beings does not allow for any part of a whole human being to survive after death since they are an indissoluble unit. Thus, when the physical body (*bāśār*) dies, the whole person (*nepeš*) ceases to exist.[25] As such, there is no room for a theology of life after death. However, as Wolff rightly argues:

> Anthropological problems cannot be solved by screening off theology, but only in complete openness to the divine witness of the Bible. Indeed, in correction of the fashionable anthropologization of theology, the scholar will have to be alive to the possibility of a theological understanding of anthropological phenomena.[26]

The longstanding notion of monistic holism and its impact on a theology of life after death has been challenged of late.[27] Cooper has argued convincingly that OT holism need not be monistic holism. Rather than depicting humans in the OT as indissoluble unities, which essentially eliminates the possibility of life after death, he proposes a functional holism that "affirms the functional unity of some entity in its totality, the integration and interrelation of all the parts in the existence and proper operation of the whole."[28] Functional holism implies that the whole organism would *not* cease to function if one part no longer functioned. According to Cooper:

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[25]Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife*, 36; for a discussion of current scholarship regarding biblical anthropology and the afterlife, see pp 33-38.

[26]Wolff, *Anthropology*, 3.

[27] Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife,* 34.

[28] Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, ch. 2, III A.

> Holism does not necessarily imply that if the whole is broken up, all parts disintegrate into chaos or nothingness. Secondary systems might continue to exist, although without all the properties and capacities they had when integrated within the whole…On this view, souls, spirits, minds, or persons might be able to exist without organisms, although they would be deprived by the loss. Let us call what I have been describing here 'functional holism.'[29]

This idea paves the way for a post-mortem existence and provides a basis for realizing that "anthropological holism is not the knock-down argument that some suggest."[30] When approached theologically, holism need not preclude a continued existence after death, for that part of the human that originated with God still functions in some way after death, albeit not in the same fashion as before death.

It is interesting to note, that when interpreted theologically, functional anthropology and Trinitarian theological anthropology beautifully inform one another. The three persons of the Godhead function in perfect unity with each other and at the same time remain three distinct persons, with three unique functions. "The communion of the Godhead does not compromise the distinctiveness of the three. In this way, *particularity* and *relatedness* co-occur because their relatedness is characterized by perfect *reciprocity* where the three live with and for each other."[31] Functional holism acts in a similar manner; the parts of the whole human function alone and in harmony with one another in life. Furthermore, theological anthropology affirms that human beings are made in the image of God (*imago dei*). Although the OT people had no concept of the Trinity, they did understand themselves as image bearers of the living God (Gen 1:26). Perhaps

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[29] Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, ch. 2, IIIA. Cooper is *contra* a monistic, or as he terms it, 'ontological' holism that "defines the very being of an entity and its constituents in terms of their systematic unity… The parts, aspects, and dimensions of the thing have being only in virtue of their status within the whole. Their existence, their nature, and their identity all depend on the whole… So if the whole breaks up, the parts cease to be what they were. No parts can survive the dissolution of the whole intact."

[30] Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife,* 36.

[31] Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyne King, and Kevin S. Reiner, *The Reciprocating Self: A Trinitarian Analogy of Being and Becoming* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016), 37.

the holistic way in which the biblical people viewed themselves sprang from their understanding of God as one as in Deut 6:5 which instructs the people to love YHWH with their whole (*kol*) heart (*lêḇ*), self/living being (*nepeš*), and might/muchness (*me'od*).[32] In any case, the doctrine of the Trinity certainly shares features of functional holism and if nothing else, serves as an apt analogy for it.

2.1.1.2 *bāśār*

The term *bāśār* may be translated as: human or animal flesh (Gen 2:21, 17:11; Lev 4:11); the body as a whole (Lev 19:28; 1 Kgs 21:27); relationship or what binds people together (Gen 29:14, 37:27); or weakness (Deut. 5:6). It never refers to God.[33] Consequently, *bāśār* nuances the powerlessness of mortal humankind, and "also the feebleness of his faithfulness and obedience to the will of God."[34] Humans are created in God's image, but they are not God. They are bone and flesh, animated by God. The first words spoken by a human being in the HB were Adam's joyful exclamation: "This now at last is bone (*'eṣem*) from my bones and flesh (*bāśār*) from my flesh" (Gen 2:23 IB, וַיֹּאמֶר֙ הָאָדָ֔ם זֹ֚את הַפַּ֣עַם עֶ֔צֶם מֵֽעֲצָמַ֖י וּבָשָׂ֣ר מִבְּשָׂרִ֑י). The use of the anthropological terms bone and flesh adds nuanced meaning to the text that at first glance, may be overlooked. Unlike the animals, the whole woman shares the same material as the whole man — they will become one flesh (*bāśār* as a binding relationship). However, flesh and bone carry other connotations. Flesh, as we have seen, can be synonymous with weakness. Conversely bone (*'eṣem*) may be an antonym of flesh, especially in light of the fact that *'eṣem* is derived from a verb meaning "to make strong"

[32] F. LeRon Shultz, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), ch. 6, 10. Shultz writes: "Both Karl Barth and Wolfhart Pannenberg assert that a human being is essentially constituted by a specific form of relationality, and both develop models of the *imago Dei* in which the relationality that constitutes humanity is structurally analogous to the constitutive relations of the triune God."

[33] Wolff, *Anthropology*, 26-31.

[34] Ibid., 31.

(Gen 29:14). The anthropological identification of human beings as flesh and bones highlights the fact that inherent in each human being are weaknesses, strengths, and created physical material.

Furthermore, a theology of life after death is embedded within this narrative through the concrete conception of bones. Bones survive after death while flesh does not.[35] Post-mortem care, particularly preservation of the bones, was paramount to the biblical people. Did that ritual find its roots in the account of the Creation? Did bones symbolically or metaphorically allude to ongoing life after death? The stories of Elisha's bones and their life-giving power in 1Kgs 13:20-21 and Ezekiel's vision of revivified dry bones in Ezek 37:1-13 appear to imagine an understanding of bones as a metaphor for ongoing life after death.

2.1.2.3 *rûaḥ*

Rûaḥ is the term most often used for the wind or moving air and usually refers to God (Gen 1:2), although it can apply to humans or false gods.[36] It was in the cool refreshing *rûaḥ* of the day, that the sound of God walking in the garden was heard in Gen 3:8. It was God's instrument, used to dry the earth after the flood (Gen 8:1), part the sea (Exod 14:21-2), bring quail to the hungry Israelites (Num 11:31), and transport prophets (1 Kgs 18:12). Whenever '*rûaḥ* refers to wind in the HB, it is always being used mightily by God. In addition, the *rûaḥ* of God is a powerful vital force. Indeed, "Yahweh's *rûaḥ* is the creative *power of life.*"[37] God at times imparts his *rûaḥ* upon human beings for various reasons,[38] but here too, God has authority over the *rûaḥ.* When *rûaḥ* is applied to human beings, it may refer to one's breath. It animates lifeless human flesh and as such, is often parallel to *n^{e}šāmā* and *nepeš.* It is given by God and departs back to God upon death (Eccl

[35] Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 179.
[36] This discussion is based on Wolff, *Anthropology*, 31-39.
[37] Ibid., 34.
[38] Ibid., 36. Examples include Num 11:17, 25, 26, 29; 1 Kgs 22:21-23; 2 Kgs 19:7; 2:9-15.

12:7). It also signifies human feelings, such as having a spirit of grief (Gen 26:35) or feeling overwhelmed. When the Queen of Sheba beheld the court of King Solomon, "there was no more *rûaḥ* in her" (1 Kgs 10:5). The splendor literally knocked the wind out of her! Closely related to *rûaḥ* as spirit is that of will. According to Wolff, "the enlivening and authorizing efficacy of Yahweh…is adapted to be the bearer of energetic actions of the will."[39]

When determining a theology of death to life in the HB it is important to understand that the word *rûaḥ* never stands for living human beings collectively or for the person as a whole. It is a special gift from God, under his authority, which allowed the biblical people "to differentiate between individual persons and their constituent elements, as well as between the inward spiritual core of a person and the various outward manifestations of that person's life. A person's spirit or life, accordingly, could be seen as something transcending corporeality. In its consistent view that *rûaḥ* is God's special gift, the OT refers to this transcendent character. We may conclude that it would be wrong to overemphasize the 'synthetic' thought or the 'monism' of the OT."[40] *Rûaḥ* contributes to an understanding of functional holism. It is a vital force, emanating from God to humans that transcends death, and as such, contributes to a theology of ongoing life.

2.1.2.4 *n^{e}šāmā*

Closely related to *rûaḥ* and *nepeš'* is the term *n^{e}šāmā*. The life of a human being in the OT is manifested in the breath (*n^{e}šāmā*), and to an even greater extent the blood (*dām*).[41] When the son of the widow of Zarephath dies (1 Kgs 17:17), it is said that "he had no breath (*n^{e}šāmā*) left to

[39] Wolfe, *Anthropology*, 38. Caleb had 'a different *rûaḥ*,' so that he, unlike the rest of the wilderness generation, followed Yahweh completely (Num 14:24).

[40] S. Tengström and H. Fabry, "*rûaḥ* רוּחַ," in *TDOT* 13*,* eds. G. J. Botterweck *et al.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 379.

[41] Wolff, *Anthropology, 59.*

him" (IB). Death was indicated when breathing stopped.[42] Conversely, living creatures are those that breathe. Wolff notes:

> Breath as characteristic of life shows that man is indissolubly connected with God…man's existence as living being is thanks to Yahweh's infusion of breath. Thus, breath as the basic function of human life is to keep man bound together with his Creator and preserver.[43]

Whether the use of *n^{e}šāmā* refers to the breath of God as a destructive force (2 Sam 22:16; Job 4:9), a fiery stream of brimstone (Isa 30:33) or the source of life that vitalizes humans (Gen 2:7; 1 Kgs 17:17) — it always originates with God,[44] and thus has theological implications for a theology of death to life in the biblical narratives.

2.1.2.5 *nepeš*

Nepeš is perhaps the most controversial term in the study of biblical anthropology, particularly in regard to the possibility of an afterlife in the HB. The word *nepeš* occurs 755 times in the OT and has been understood to encompass the person as a whole. That is to say, "human beings in the OT do not *have* a 'soul'; they *are* a 'living soul/*nepeš*'" (Gen 2:7).[45] Although it cannot be denied that it imagines human existence and "is designed to be seen together with the whole form of man, and especially his breath," very few instances of *nepeš* should be interpreted as "soul."[46] The textual context determines the term's meaning. Therefore, one must ascertain the functions or characteristics of the body part to which *nepeš* is referring that speaks to an aspect of human existence. For example, the Semitic people understood eating, drinking, and breathing as all

[42] Donald J. Wiseman, *1and2 Kings,* TOTC (Downers Grove: IVP,1993), 166.
[43] Wolff, *Anthropology,* 60.
[44] Baker and Carpenter, *CWSDOT,* 758.
[45] D. D. Hopkins, (2000). "Humanity," in *EDB*, eds. D. N. Freedman *et al*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 615, (italics mine).
[46] Wolff, *Anthropology*, 10. This discussion of *nepeš* is from Wolff's analysis pp. 10-18.

occurring in the throat. As such, a hungry or thirsty *nepeš* is satisfied by eating or drinking. The anthropological understanding of *nepeš* as throat (as opposed to soul) is illustrated in Ps 107:5-6:

> The hungry and thirsty whose *nepeš* fainted within them,
> For he satisfies the thirsty *nepeš* and the hungry *nepeš* he fills with good things.

In our discussion of *n^{e}šāmā* above in the story of the death of the son of the widow of Zarephath, his coming back to life is described as the "return of his *nepeš*" (1 Kgs: 21-2). Since his death was identified as "no breath (*n^{e}šāmā*) left in him" (1Kgs 17:17), *nepeš* is synonymous with *n^{e}šāmā,* and is to be understood in this instance as referring to the throat, where breathing originates. This rendering of *nepeš* will come into play in chapter three, where we will examine the death narrative of Rachel.

The term *nepeš* was is nuanced anthropologically and can refer to: the outside of the neck (*ṣawwā'r*) (1 Sam 28:9); a vital desire or longing (Ps 42:1); life experience, as it is imagined as a vital organ of survival (Deut 12:23); and soul, as "the seat and action of other spiritual experiences and emotions" that are rooted in life experience (Exod 23:9), including suffering (Job 30:25), fright (Ps 6:3), despondence (Jonah 2:7), affliction (Gen 42:21), trouble (2 Kgs 4:27), rage (Judg 18:25) and more.[47] Consequently, when imagining a theology of death to life, it is important to concentrate on those instances of *nepeš* where soul actually represents the meaning.

James Barr makes a strong case against the current trend in scholarship of the human being as a dissoluble whole based on the term *nepeš*. He argues that there is a reasonable possibility that there is a 'soul' that is different from the psychosomatic whole. He points to Ps 42 as an example where, if interpreted in a monistic way, it would picture the person as addressing his own totality. Rather, says Barr, "it makes more sense that he is addressing his soul, an entity which is associated

[47] Wolff, *Anthropology,* 17.

with his psychosomatic unity but in some sense is also outside it, independent of it." [48] He also notes the mobility of the *nepeš.* In 1 Kgs 17:21 the *nepeš* comes: "Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, 'O LORD my God, let this child's *nepeš* come into him again'" (ESV). Gen 35:18 records the *nepeš* leaving: "And as her *nepeš* was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin" (ESV). If the term means soul in those passages, then it follows that *nepeš* is something that lives in or with a person, but also is an independent life-giving source of power. Barr goes on to assert that since the *nepeš* as soul is closely associated with life, it seems unlikely that it is supposed to die, and what is more the text rarely states that it does. [49] Barr proposes:

> It seems probable that in certain contexts the *nepeš* is *not*, as much present opinion favors, a unity of body and soul…it is rather, in these contexts, a superior controlling center which accompanies, expresses and directs the existence of that totality, and one which, especially, provides the life to the whole. Because it is the life-giving element, it is difficult to conceive that it itself will die. It may simply return to God, the source of that life.[50]

We have shown that an understanding of holism as functional rather than monistic and a re-imagining of the interpretation of *nepeš* as soul (that part of a person that continues after the body dies) most assuredly creates space for a theology of life after death in the HB. In addition, anthropological terms are infused with somatic as well as emotional nuances. These concepts are foundational to our study. However, as compelling as an anthropological argument may be toward supporting our thesis, it is important from a theological standpoint, to never lose sight of the fact that it is God, our loving, powerful creator, who grants us life in the here and the hereafter. It is in the character of the living God that hope of life after death resides. Joel Green notes "The capacity

[48] Barr, *Garden of Eden* 38-39.
[49] Ibid., 40.
[50] Ibid., 42-43 (italics his.)

for life-after-death is not intrinsic to humanity, but is a divine gift, and resurrection signifies not rescue from the cosmos but transformation with it…its possibility solely…God's gracious initiative."[51]

2.2 Thanatologies of the ANE

As noted above, many scholars such as Hallo, Pitard, Lewis, and Suriano, have questioned the value of over focusing on the area of comparative studies between Israel and its neighbors for understanding the theological ideologies of the biblical people, particularly their attitudes and beliefs concerning death and the afterlife. Therefore, our survey will be brief, and our focus will not center on comparative studies. Rather, we will look at the epics and general practices of the surrounding ANE cultures of Mesopotamia, Canaan and Egypt with an eye toward how they may have influenced the biblical writers to embed their belief in the afterlife within the stories of the OT.

The surrounding pagan nations recorded their histories and sacred writings in epic form. Reciting the epics "was tantamount to an enactment of cosmic events in the manner of sympathetic magic."[52] However, the biblical authors were concerned with the demythologizing of death, a task that was both difficult — considering the proximity of the surrounding ANE thanatologies — and yet essential for the people of YHWH.[53] As we have noted, the monotheistic Hebrew writers accomplished demythization by creating a new medium — that of story or historiography; narrative versus epic — a method that is distinct at many points from the literary epics scattered throughout the ANE writings.[54] Sarna aptly notes:

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[51] Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible*, STI (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 93.

[52]Shemaryahu Talmon, *The 'Comparative Method' In Biblical Interpretation – Principles and Problems* (Leiden: Gottingen Congress Volume, 1978), 354.

[53]Wolff, *Anthropology*, 102.

[54] Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 205.

> The old mythological motifs were not slavishly borrowed…Sometimes, in fact, these motifs seem to have been deliberately used in order to empty them of their polytheistic content and fill them with totally new meaning, refined, dynamic and vibrant. At other times, they have been torn out of their life context to become mere literary devices…In either case, it is in this sphere that the uniqueness of the biblical literature becomes apparent.[55]

The writers of the HB utilized pagan myths in unexpected and unprecedented ways in order to illustrate the greatness and sovereignty of God, by weaving them into their historical stories.

2.2.1 Mesopotamian Thanatology

According to the Babylonian *Epic*, humans were created by the gods in order to be their servants:

> Blood I will mass and cause bones to be.
> I [*Marduk* to *Ea*] will establish a savage, 'man' shall be his name.
> Verily, savage-man I will create.
> He shall be charged with the service of the gods
> That they might be at ease! (VI, 5-8)
>
> Out of his [*Kingu*] blood they fashioned mankind,
> He [*Ea*] imposed the service and let free the gods. (VI, 33-4) [56]

These lines suggest that humans are totally expendable and death occurs when they are no longer useful. Therefore, death reflects and reinforces the negative status of humans and distinguishes them from the gods. The capriciousness of the Mesopotamian gods led to a religion and thanatology of appeasement, including feeding of the dead. Religious practices consisted of meticulous attention to altars, holy and sacrificial places, and the observance of procedures. Failure or lapses would result in dire consequences. So too death practices sought to avert the

[55] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The World of the Bible in the Light of History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), xxvii-xxviii.

[56] "The Creation Epic" in *ANET,* 3rd ed. with Supplement, ed. James B. Pritchard, trans. E. A. Speiser (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 68. Humankind is formed, as punishment, from the blood of the rebellious, banished *Kingu* (Tablet VI, Lines 29-33).

potential anger of the gods or the ancestors. One served the dead in order to procure favors from them. The dead were feared, not venerated, and keeping them sympathetic resulted in an elaborate cult of the dead. Burial and family tombs were important as they were accesses to the underworld where the ghosts of the dead resided.[57]

The journey to the netherworld, the ultimate Mesopotamian destination after death, was an arduous one. Therefore, to ensure the dead access to the afterlife, cults of the dead provided them with ongoing funerary offerings. After proper burial, the ghost of the deceased descended to the netherworld, a dark and gloomy place where "there is a pervading sense of misery…[and] no concept of a happy afterlife."[58] The ghosts of the departed remained in the netherworld for most of the year. However, several times annually they were permitted to return, as ghosts, for short visits. On these occasions, the dead were lavished with food offerings and sent back to the netherworld on boats. It is possible that the *Epic of Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld* was recited during this ritual.[59]

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* chronicles the adventures of Gilgamesh, King of Uruk and his search for immortality. No complete edition of the epic has survived. Scholars have formed a composite of two major versions dated from 1750–1600 BCE and 750–612 BCE that were refined over the next four centuries.[60] Gilgamesh's quest is ultimately doomed as he discovers his limitations as a mortal. His fear of death, however, is assuaged when he comes to realize "mortals

[57] Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth*, 50-68.

[58] A. K. Grayson, "Mesopotamia, History of: History and Culture of Babylonia" in *AYBD*, 4, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 774-75.

[59] Jo Ann Scurlock, "Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamian Thought," in *Civilizations of the ANE,* vol. 3, ed. J. Sasson (New York: Scribner's, 1995), 1884-89.

[60] J. Sasson, "Gilgamesh Epic" in *AYBD,* vol. 2, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1025.

achieve immortality through recorded deeds and personal legacy. Reconciled, Gilgamesh celebrates his achievement, making the city of Uruk to carry his name for eternity."[61]

It is of small wonder that the biblical writers would wish to distance themselves from such a thanatology. The creation of man in God's image and all that position implies could not be further from the low value placed on human life in the Mesopotamian epics. The death of Mesopotamian human beings, created merely to serve as expendable slaves of the gods, would pale in comparison to that of an Israelite, created as an image bearer of the living God. Immortality achieved through city building and great deeds would be available to precious few human beings. In contrast, the God of the Hebrews, in all his greatness, chose to serve and work on behalf of all his people. It follows that the God who created humankind in his own image and who has graced them with his presence, would desire that relationship to transcend death, for their worth is in their perpetual covenantal relationship with him.

2.2.2 Canaanite Thanatology[62]

What is known about Canaanite thanatology is taken largely from Ugaritic texts from the LBA, and Phoenician and biblical material from the IA. However, it is the Ugaritic documentation that offers the greater contribution toward a study of Canaanite ideology concerning death and the afterlife.[63]

Death was an area of great interest to the Canaanites. They lived alongside the tombs of their dead. Archeological evidence suggests that houses were designed to accommodate the living

[61] J. C. Kuo and J. D. Redding, "Gilgamesh, Epic of" in *LBD,* ed. J. D. Barry *et al.* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016). Logos version.

[62] Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 13, writes. "For the biblical writers, the terms Hittite, Amorite, and Canaanite functioned…as ideological symbols for the indigenous non-Israelite inhabitants of Palestine."

[63] Xella, *Death and the Afterlife,* 2060-61. See fn. 7 for an argument against the use of Ugaritic material, particularly for biblical interpretation of death practices.

and the dead, who were buried in the family tomb, often located under the house. It is possible that this close proximity to the dead ensured that the survivors would remember and care for the deceased by providing prayers, memorials and food. In exchange, the dead provided healing, fertility and divination concerning the future — all of which, for the biblical people, originated from God.[64]

The 14th century *Ba'al Cycle* epic, as with most great ANE myths that result in a change in circumstances of a god, has death at the center of the story. *Ba'al*, the storm god, battles both *Yamm*, the god of the chaotic sea, and *Mot*, the god of death. The *Ba'al Cycle* seeks to define "a correct definition of the relationship between cosmos and chaos, life and death."[65] *Ba'al* vanquishes *Yamm* only to die while battling *Mot.* He then returns from the underworld with help from his sister. Eventually *Ba'al* triumphs over *Mot* who recognizes *Ba'al's* kingship.[66] As such, the result of the cosmic battle is that *Ba'al* ultimately triumphs over death.

In addition, as storm god, *Ba'al* is considered the source of life-giving rain and as such is connected to the agricultural cycle and fertility. [67] Smith writes that in the *Ba'al Cycle*:

> *El* laments the condition of humanity because *Ba'al's* death signals the absence of rain. *El* later has a dream vision that anticipates *Ba'al's* rains and the rejuvenation of the earth. The cycle recapitulates the progression of a single storm: it rises out of the west and battles over the Mediterranean Sea; then it reaches the coast at the site of *Ba'al's* mountain, and is 'enthroned' for a short time; finally, it moves into

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[64] Xella, *Death and the Afterlife,* 2061. This is *contra* Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 197, who argues that "we cannot know whether the dead were buried beneath the dwellings of surviving family members or in abandoned houses ... there is no way of knowing whether the family remained in the house or that they felt compelled to leave it." He suggests that perhaps this practice would safeguard the corpse against grave robbery or desecration by an invading army. However, one must ask: was the 'rank and file' Canaanite grave worth robbing, and if burying the corpse under a house was common practice, how was this an effort to conceal the grave?

[65] Xella, *Death and the Afterlife*. 2061. For more on Canaanite mythology see: Mark Smith, "Myth and Mythmaking in Canaan and Ancient Israel" in *Civilizations of the ANE,* vol. 3, ed. J. Sasson (NY: Scribner's, 1995), 2021-34.

[66] Smith, "Myth and Mythmaking," 2032.

[67] Walton, *ANE Thought, 321.* "*Ba'al* was the storm god par excellence in the religious perception of the inhabitants of Syria-Palestine during the biblical period…Though subordinate to *El* in the divine assembly he is more active. As storm god, he is the source of vitalizing rains. This connection, as well as his connection to the agricultural cycle, associates him with fertility."

> the realm of Death toward the great Syrian desert, the graveyard of many a Mediterranean storm. The *Ba'al Cycle* likewise narrates the story of human life itself. In sum, the *Ba'al Cycle* replicates on numerous levels the basic fabric of reality through the theme of *Ba'al's* kingship.[68]

The story of Elijah's encounter with the four hundred and fifty prophets of *Ba'al* in 1 Kgs 18:16-46 is an example of Sarna's proposal that the HB refines existing pagan epics by infusing them with theological meaning. Here we find many allusions to the *Ba'al* Cycle epic, noted by Smith. Elijah's taunt, when *Ba'al* does not react to his prophet's overtures: "Shout louder! Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened" (v. 27) reflects Canaanite beliefs concerning *Ba'al*. As the day wears on and *Ba'al* remains silent and inactive, Elijah instructs his servant to look west, toward the sea, for a rain cloud. "The seventh time the servant reported, 'a cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea'… Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on…" (vv. 44-45). The prophets of the silent, powerless *Ba'al* are killed. *Ba'al* does not triumph over death. Here is a case where the biblical writers effectively illustrate, by incorporating elements of the *Ba'al* epic into the story of Elijah's encounter with *Ba'al's* prophets, that it is Yahweh who is the source of the storm, the life-giving rains, and by extension, all life. What has been attributed to *Ba'al* in the epic is in actuality brought about by God in the HB.

In sum, the Canaanite death rituals, which included close proximity to the dead in exchange for favors, is re-imagined in the HB where God provides and cares for his people. The favors the living would seek from *Ba'al* or the dead, are ascribed to God (i.e., fertility, provision and prophecy/divine communication). The elaborate myths and epics associated with the underworld and any existence therein are absent in the biblical narratives. Levenson aptly argues that "we

[68] Smith, "Myth and Mythmaking," 2033.

should *respect* the disinterest [in the abode of the dead], viewing it as characteristic of the nature of Israelite religion as reflected in the Hebrew Bible…For the focus of that book is not on the world of the dead but on that of the living."[69] Here too, the HB distances itself from the epic and the afterlife centered on the underworld associated with it. The biblical writers, using prose as opposed to epic, were able to weave a theology of death to life within the stories of the living God. Prose narrates everyday life. It describes God's actions in the world. We see him actively engaging with his people in history. There is not a hint of magic, rather the presence of the transcendent God comes down and his behavior is described in story.

2.2.3 Egyptian Thanatology

The creation of humans in Egyptian cosmogony is quite different from that of Mesopotamia. Literature pertaining to the creation of humanity is rare in Egyptian texts. One text used the similarity between the Egyptian word for humans (*rmṯ*) and tears (*rmyt*) to indicate that humans were born from the tears shed from Atum's eye: "I made the gods evolve from my sweat, while people are from the tears of my eye" (Coffin Texts, Spell 1130).[70] Another text suggests that a god referred to as The Shaper creates mankind as part of the world of plants and animals. Humans are a natural result of the creativity of the gods and not singled out in the creation event.[71]

The average life span of an Egyptian during the dynastic periods was 30-36 years and archeological evidence confirms that the "ordinary Egyptians died young and ill."[72] It is not surprising therefore, that Egypt was a nation fixated on extending life after death. What is more, non-existence was considered worse than death.[73] Sarna notes that "in Egypt, with its death-

[69] Levenson, *Resurrection,* 65 (brackets mine).
[70] B. D. Bibb, "Creation Myths" in *LBD,* ed. J. D. Barry *et al.* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos.
[71] Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth,* 68.
[72] Ibid., 28.
[73] Leonard H. Lesko, "Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egyptian Thought," *Civilizations of the ANE,* vol. 3, ed. J. Sasson (NY: Scribner's, 1995), 1766.

centered religion, the way to bring an end to the continued existence of a deceased person in the afterlife was by effacing his name from his tomb."[74]

For the Egyptian, death was not viewed as the end. Rather it provided the opportunity for continued existence and fulfillment. The afterlife was thought of as more life with all problems removed. Funerary practices were designed to prevent a second death or oblivion by providing the means for transcending the gulf between this world and the next. Spells and rituals sought to deny the chaos of death and its dismembering consequences, giving the deceased the opportunity to reassemble life "in unity with Osiris and the eternal journey of Ra in the skies and in the underworld."[75] Incantations sought to deny death and maintain the unity and integrity of the person, hence the importance of the mummy. Aspects of the person would be reattached to the body (mummy). The soul would in effect "revivify the body."[76] The deceased would eventually live to become Osiris if they passed successfully through the journey that follows death, including a series of tests and trials serving as judgment. The Egyptians were concerned with preserving the flesh of the dead as opposed to the Israelites who preserved the bones.[77] The embalming process sought to maintain the unity of the person that consisted of four elements or aspects of the life force.[78] This allowed for them to re-enter or revitalize the body after death. Egyptian tombs were in essence homes, complete with all that was necessary to carry on activities of daily living, including furniture and pets.[79]

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[74] Sarna, *Understanding Genesis,* 130.

[75] Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth,* 29. Davies points out that what is known as *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* would be better called *Books of Going Out into the Day* which was the Egyptian term for these writings.

[76] Ibid., 38.

[77] Robert Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 283.

[78] Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth,* 30. The four elements are *ka* (the ability to door act), *ba* (invigored by death, this element binds the *ka* and the mummy), *xu* (the evidence of a heart conscience), and the *body.*

[79] Ibid., *Death, Burial and Rebirth,* 33.

The Egyptian expectation was that their bodily and spiritual components would survive in the afterlife and as such they were concerned with religious preparations for death.[80] The Osiris cult practices noted here pertain to the rich and powerful. However, the Egyptian culture was one that had "totally integrated the world of the living with the world of the dead."[81] The lower classes could achieve in death what they never could in life. Furthermore, in death the difference between man and the gods is transcended. Such a thanatology would certainly be troublesome to the biblical writers. YHWH is the one true God, and the only living God. His people do not seek equality with him, rather they rely on him. Surely the biblical narrative seeks to distance itself from a culture whose main preoccupation in life is to die and become a god;[82] a culture where the corpse takes the place of the Creator by revitalizing itself.

The Mesopotamian, Canaanite and Egyptian attitudes toward death were incompatible with the monotheism of the Hebrews.[83] For the former, after living a life of ritual appeasement and service to the gods, humans die and become ghosts in the dismal netherworld. During life, man was viewed as a discardable slave of the gods, not a valued image bearer. For the latter, death was a continuation of earthly life; the ultimate goal was to become a god. Sarna writes:

> The quest for immortality seems to have been an obsessive factor in ANE religion and literature. The preoccupation with death was the most characteristic feature of Egyptian civilization to the prominence of which the mighty pyramids still bear eloquent testimony. The Gilgamesh legend of Mesopotamia, to name but one, is

[80] Lesko, "Death and the Afterlife," 1774.

[81] Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth*, 39.

[82] Lesko, Death and the Afterlife," 1768. Lesko notes that: "The Egyptians had diverse conception of the afterlife…By the time of the Coffin Texts [*c.* 2100 BCE], the hereafter had been democratized, and any goal, including solar voyage, was considered attainable by all."

[83] Sarna, *Understanding Genesis,* xxviii, notes: "Nowhere else in the contemporary world did [monotheism] become the regnant idea, obsessive and historically significant. Israel's monotheism constituted a new Creation, a revolution in religion, a transformation." The ANE epics are characterized by chaotic turmoil between the gods who "control" different aspects of nature, and the impact of their actions on human beings. In contrast, the monotheism of the HB — one God, who creates and sustains everything and who loves and values humankind — could not be further removed. His covenantal relationship effectively removes the uncertainty associated with the capricious ANE gods (brackets mine).

> the best known literary expression of this recurring theme in that part of the world. By relegating the "tree of life" to an insignificant, subordinate role in the Garden of Eden story, the Bible dissociates itself completely from this pre-occupation. Its concern is with the issue of living rather than with the question of death, with morality rather than mortality. Its problem is not with the mythical pursuit of eternity, but the actual relationships between man and God.[84]

The biblical writers distanced themselves from a preoccupation with death by skillfully embedding a theology of death to life within the text that dismissed Mesopotamian, Canaanite and Egyptian beliefs, often by ascribing new meaning to their pagan practices. Hoffmeier asserts that the sojourn of the Hebrews in Egypt influenced their religion. He observes that "religious practices can serve as a marker of ethnicity and assimilation and *can also be a valuable tool to resist assimilation*[85]. The biblical stories provided such a tool — a vehicle by which Israel was able to overcome contemporary paganism and "develop a unique religio-moral civilization of universal and eternal value."[86]

2.3 Hebrew Burial Practices

A complete study of Israelite burial practices, those of the surrounding ANE, and how they may have influenced one another is outside the bounds of our study. Therefore, we will narrow our scope to archaeological material pertaining to burials in the Levant, during the Middle and Late Bronze ages — the time of the patriarchs, settlement and early monarchy. During these periods, and into the IA, the biblical people developed mortuary practices that were uniquely their own.

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[84] Sarna, *Understanding Genesis,* 26-27.

[85] James K. Hoffmeier, "Egyptian Religious Influences on the Early Hebrews" in *Did I Not Bring Israel Out of Egypt? Biblical, Archaeological, and Egyptological Perspectives on the Exodus Narratives,* eds., James K. Hoffmeier and Alan R. Millard (Winona Lake: Penn State University Press, 2012) 5-6. Hoffmeier cites the example of Daniel and his companions in Dan chs. 1, 3 (italics mine).

[86] Ibid., xxx. See also Oswalt, *Bible among Myths,* 150, who states, "The Bible reports to us that they [the Hebrew people] broke away from both Egyptian bondage and from the Egyptian understanding of the world because of unique, nonrepeatable experiences that were divinely interpreted to them. If that is not the case, we are hard pressed to explain why Israel chose to create this unique historical fiction to tell its story" (brackets mine).

The emergence of the bench tomb in the IA reflects cave burial practices that originated in the MB-LB ages — particularly that of secondary burial.[87]

In order to ascertain a theology of life after death in the biblical stories, we will interpret the archaeological data theologically concerning death practices, including burial types, cults of the dead and ancestor worship. Hallote points out that "it is an intrinsic problem in archaeology that scholars tend to view Bronze Age tombs primarily as tools for understanding social organization and less frequently explore them in terms of their role in death-related religious rituals and religion."[88] In reality, ancient burials have less to do with class structure or economic status (although they are important considerations) than they do religious practices. Theology should be very much a part of the archaeological interpretation of tomb excavations, for "the Hebrew Bible provides an understanding of the place of burial within the theological organization of the society."[89]

2.3.1 Judahite Burial Practices

Bloch-Smith has surveyed 850 highland and lowland burial sites in the Levant. She identified eight types of burials and their grave goods.[90] Types of graves include: simple or pit graves, cist tombs, jar and pithoi burials, anthropoid coffins, bathtub coffins, cremation, cave burials and later, rock cut bench tombs. The first six types were found in the lowlands, coastal plains, and Shephelah and

[86]Suriano, *History of Death,* 56. For a comprehensive survey of the development of the bench tomb see pp 56-91.

[87] Rachel S. Hallote, "Real and Ideal Identities in Middle Bronze Age Tombs," in *Near Eastern Archaeology*, Jun., 2002, vol 65, no.2, *The Archaeology of death,* 105-11.

[88]Ibid., 1056-111.

[89] Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*; see pp. 25-62, for a through survey of burial types in the Levant.

exhibited Canaanite, Philistine, Sea People/Phoenician, Egyptian, Syrian, and Assyrian influences and practices. Cremation was rare in Israel. The sole instance of cremation in the HB is that of the defiled bodies of Saul and his sons (1 Sam 31:12-3). Cave burials and rock cut tombs are closely related in structure and the manner in which they functioned, and will be the focus of our survey.

Burial in caves was the predominate type of interment in the LBA and into the first centuries of the IA in the Judahite highlands. Beginning in the tenth century BCE, with increased highland settlement, the number of sites employing rock-cut bench tombs grew. Bloch-Smith argues that the relatively isolated terrain of the Judahite highlands, led to a more homogeneous set of burial practices, that consisted in large part of cave tombs.[91] However, as isolated as the highlands may have been, it was difficult to separate totally from the indigenous Canaanite population and their practices, as evidenced by the numerous biblical cautions against syncretism. As such, it is likely that the unique highland burial practices were theologically influenced.

Suriano notes, "The bench tomb and the mortuary practices associated with it created a cultural identity that was peculiar to the Southern Kingdom. The cultural meaning embedded in the bench tomb … marks a continuation of earlier Bronze Age practices in its use of extramural caves tombs."[92] He identifies other "cultural" differences including extramural cemeteries, as opposed to the Assyrian and Aramaean intramural cemeteries, the unique treatment of the body (secondary burial of the bones), and the uniformity of mortuary practices that differed from the diverse customs in the northern kingdom of Israel.[93] Bloch-Smith's interpretation of the

[90] Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices,* 142-43. *"*As was the case in Judah, either the indigenous highland dwellers adopted the bench tomb (from the neighboring site of Tel Dothan) or adherents of the bench tomb burying culture moved up into the highlands bringing the bench tomb with them" (Josh. 17:15–18). Bloch-Smith agrees that other factors, such as geography, climate, political and economic status came into play. For instance, the mountainous, rugged terrain of the Judahite highlands lends itself well to cave burials, 18. Suriano, *History of Death,* 60 observes, "the origins of the bench tomb are often associated with the lowland hills – the Shephelah – where the earliest examples are found along with their cultural forerunners."

[91] Suriano, *History of Death,* 92.

[92] Ibid., 91-92.

archaeological uniqueness of Judahite burial practices as stemming from isolation, and Suriano's cultural explanations both have merit. However, we shall see that a theological interpretation of the Judahite burial practices provides an understanding of those customs that is in line with the claims of the biblical text.

The story of the purchase of the patriarchal tomb for Sarah by Abraham in Gen 23 beautifully illustrates the cave burial practice and its importance to the biblical people. The actual purchase of the tomb of the patriarchs was so noteworthy that a whole chapter was devoted to it, much more text than to any actual death! The significance of this purchase is highlighted by the fact that the final mention of the transaction is not of Sarah's actual burial, but that the field and cave were deeded to Abraham (v. 20). What would appear at first glance to be a story of only passing interest, in truth, signified ownership of land in Canaan for Abraham and his seed; a fulfillment of God's covenant promise. It illustrates the importance of the relationship between Abraham's familial tomb and the land on which it is situated as promise-fulfillment. Burial in the family tomb of the foundational ancestors served as a physical marker of the family claim to the land and the covenant. The continuation of that practice by the biblical people symbolizes a belief in their inclusion in that promise. Suriano writes:

> If we turn to…the divine promises to Abraham in Gen 15:15-16, it becomes possible to recognize the future outlook of mortuary culture in the biblical world. The motifs of reunion with ancestors, proper burial, and progeny together form a constellation of meaning. But this meaning relates to more than just the ideals of a good death. It points forward to a time when Israel had settled into its inheritance.[94]

Suriano argues that the biblical people's understanding of an afterlife was functional immortality through progeny, and not post-mortem existence. He sees the tomb as a symbol of

[94] Suriano, *History of Death*, 252.

future hope and that "eventually the afterlife ideal that the ancestors embodied [functional immortality] faded into the background of their narratives. Over time, monuments of their memories became obscured by a new ideology of death. Heaven replaced the tomb, and the Greek concept of a disembodied, incorruptible soul substituted the ANE standard of a long-lasting name."[95] However, we propose that the afterlife ideal was *always* part of the burial practices. Heaven did not replace the tomb. It became the language used to describe what was symbolized by the tomb and its accompanying burial practices.

Suriano's sociological approach to burial practices regards the bench tomb as a place of perilous liminality, where the dead were transformed from corpse to ancestor. This occurred while the corpse decomposed in the tomb. "The former state is literally broken down as the dead are subsumed into a corporate status of ancestorhood."[96] However, Suriano offers no textual evidence to support this assertion, nor does he indicate how the living would know when their dead were officially ancestors. No mourning period in the HB extends beyond thirty days, hardly long enough for a body to decompose. More likely, the liminal phase would end after the burial rituals were performed and the deceased was safely ensconced in the tomb and properly mourned.

There is no textual indication that the tomb is a dangerous place for the dead or the living.[97] In fact, it was important to be buried in the familial tomb. Olyan has classified a hierarchy of burial practices ranging from most to least desirable, on basis of the biblical texts. The most desired is an honorable burial in the family tomb. The least was no burial at all. He suggests that burial in the ancestral tomb was preferred since possibly "such a burial was required for the dead to interact in

[95] Suriano, *History of Death*, 256, (brackets mine).

[96] Ibid., 52-53.

[97] Such as Suriano's suggestion of the perilous liminality of the tomb noted above. Purity issues involving contact with the dead are easily remedied through a simple ritual thereby removing fear of ritual uncleanness from contact with the tomb. Finally, any haunting or harm of the living by ghosts of the dead (with the exception of Samuel) or proximity to a tomb is absent from the narrative.

an uninhibited way with dead kin in the afterlife."[98] Furthermore, prior to interment, the deceased is said "to be gathered to/come to/lie down with one's ancestors/people." This suggests something more than a desire to be in in close physical proximity with dead ancestors. Rather these idioms "suggest something about the nature of the deceased's afterlife."[99] It implies a relational expectation that transcends the tomb.

Mazar suggests that the floorplan of Judahite burial caves "recalls that of the 'four-room house.'" He proposes that the design of the house inspired the design of the tomb and that house-like burials "demonstrate a belief in the afterlife."[100] Suriano argues that the tomb as four-room house functions as "the joint house for the dead …The living and the dead are linked through the symbol of the house."[101] We propose that both of these understandings of the tomb as house are true. For the living a theology of ongoing life after death in the house of God (Ps 23:6) is realized. And the concrete image of the tomb as house, represented to the biblical people metaphorically, that those in the tomb continued living after death.[102]

We have noted above that perhaps the most significant feature of the burial practices of the biblical people was the emphasis on the care of the bones. Unlike flesh, bones survive after death, and as such symbolize ongoing life. Joseph's final request was for the Israelites to carry his bones

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[98] Saul M. Olyan, "Some Neglected Aspects of Israelite Interment Ideology," *JBL* 124, no. 4 (2005): 601-16. Olyan offers several textual examples of this practice including: Samson's removal by his kin from Gaza to the family tomb (Judg 16:31); Jacob's dying wish to be transported back to Canaan to be buried with his fathers (Gen 49:29-33); David's transport of the body of his nephew Asahel after his death in battle to the family tomb in Bethlehem (2 Sam 2:32); Barzillai's refusal of David's offer of a pension in order to be near his parent's tomb (2 Sam 19:38); and King Josiah's transfer by his servants after his death on the battlefield (2 Kgs 23:30).

[99] Ibid., 608.

[100] Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: 10,000-586 BCE* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 521.

[101] Suriano, *History of Death,* 96-97.

[102] Ibid., 157. Suriano writes: "The provision of a full range of vessels for cooking and eating may have been related to the notion of the tomb as a house for the dead. That is the needs of the dead reflect the needs of the living." It is our proposal that the grave goods do indeed represent the needs of the living and symbolize in a concrete way that those who reside in the tomb are thought to be actually living

from Egypt to the promised land (Gen 50:25). Josh 24:32 records the secondary burial[103] of Joseph's bones in Shechem, which became the inheritance of his descendants.[104] Suriano rightly finds in the fulfillment of the oath to transport Joseph's bones "a realization of the promise of land given to Abraham in Gen 15. The generational promises given by Yahweh to the patriarchs, Joseph, and to their children constitute an afterlife ideal. It is a hope for the future that transcends death."[105] The care of bones connects the patriarchs with the Exodus and the settlement periods, and it will be identified with bodily resurrection in Ezek 37.[106]

After the men of Jabesh Gilead rescued the bodies of Saul and his sons, they burned the unclean flesh. The bones survived and were buried together under a tree (1 Sam 31:13) and later re-buried by David in the tomb of Saul's father Kish (2 Sam 21:13-14). During King Josiah's reform in 2 Kgs 23, he grinds the bones of wicked priests into dust and defiles their altars with it. But he spares the bones of two prophets, buried together, one of whom had predicted Josiah's actions centuries before the event (1 Kgs 13). In each of these stories, bones survive, and as such are symbolic of ongoing life to the biblical people. We have seen that this concept finds its roots in the Creation account. It is from a bone of Adam that woman is formed (Gen 2:22). A theological understanding of the symbolic importance of bones in the burial practices of the biblical people speaks to a belief in the afterlife. In Genesis, bones provided material for life. Their importance in burial practices and their natural indestructability continued to imagine ongoing life.

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[103] Suriano, *History of Death,* pp 56-91. Secondary burial included the practice of moving the bones of a deceased person to the side of the tomb after the body has decomposed, in order to create space for subsequent burials.

[104] This is interesting in light of the fact that Joseph was embalmed, yet no mention is made of a mummy at his burial in the land. As noted above, the Egyptians were concerned with the preserving the flesh, as opposed to the Israelites who emphasized the bones. This account highlights the lack of value placed on Egyptian practices by the Israelites.

[105] Suriano*, History of Death*, 186.

[106] Ibid., 187.

A theological interpretation of the unique Judahite burial practices, including the "house-like" cave and bench tombs, and the care of bones contributes to an understanding of these rituals as symbolic of an afterlife.

2.3.2 Cults of the Dead and Ancestor Worship

While a detailed look at the practices of cults of the dead and ancestor worship is beyond the scope of this work, we will look at the archaeological evidence from a theological point of view. Does the presence of grave goods indicate that Israelites participated in cults of the dead or worshiped their dead ancestors? In other words, did their practices function in the same way and carry the same meaning as the surrounding ANE?

Evidence of the cult of the dead is certainly found in the Bible including, laments, periods of mourning, acquisitions of tombs, and erecting of monuments, memorial stones, and the custom of secondary burial. The reburial of Jacob and Joseph is indicative of the need to be buried with the fathers in the land of their children, signifying an ongoing relationship between the living and the dead.[107] Several texts make reference to care of the dead, none of which appear to condemn the practice. Deut 26:14 is often referenced as a proof text for cults of the dead:

> I have not eaten of it in my mourning; nor have I put any of it away for uncleanness;
> nor have I given of it for the dead. (IB)

This verse establishes ritual boundaries, but does not censure food offerings to the dead, and "is not surprising given the abundant archaeological evidence for leaving food and other offerings to the dead inside tombs."[108] Schmidt makes a good case for an understanding of this

[107] C. A. Kennedy, "The Cult of the Dead" in *AYBD* 2, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 106-107.

[108] Suriano, *History of Death,* 159.

verse as a reflection of the custom of giving food to those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. "Nor have I given any of it (to those bereaving) on account of the dead."[109] Verses such as Lev 19:26; 21:1; Num 9:6-7; 19:11 do not deny or condemn contact with the dead, and by extension, care of them, for intentional contact with a corpse must include some kind of care. However, they do restrict them by imposing ritual boundaries.[110] This is of small wonder, considering that God is the creator and sustainer of all life. He is the antithesis of death and therefore cultic rituals should not come into contact with burial practices. As such, the prohibitions against contact with the dead and anything that comes in contact with the dead, resulting in ritual uncleanness (Num 19:1-21), stands in tension with the positive ideology of a good death that includes a proper burial and requires human contact.

The seven-day period of purification with its accompanying cleansing rituals creates a space of separation between God and death. Those who come in contact with death (including bones during a secondary burial), are purified by specially prepared cleansing water that contains all of the ingredients of a sin offering. Wenham notes that this water enabled the unclean person to avoid the expense of repeated sacrifices.[111] The unclean person was sprinkled on the third and seventh days. The idea of running (sprinkled) water signified life. The seven-day purification ritual period harkens back to the Creation story, where life began. On the third day of Creation, God speaks twice, separating dry land from sea, and creating living plant life. On the seventh day God created the Sabbath, a place for relationship with him. In the same way this ritual separated the living God from death, and also provided an act by which the dead could be honored by the living

[109] Schmidt, *Israel's' Beneficent Dead,* 198-200.
[110] Suriano, *History of Death,* 175.
[111] Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers,* TOTC (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 163.

in a "ceremony [that] express[ed] the deepest truths about life as the society saw them."[112] The ritual for cleansing from death was infused with a theology of life.

The archaeological study of ancient burials should never be separated from the religious rituals that accompanied their original context. Religious practices in MBA Canaan were largely household-based and played an important part of the tradition of ancestor worship in the Levant.[113] "The most vivid demonstration of how the home became the center of religion in the Middle Bronze Age is seen through mortuary archaeology."[114] The dead were interred within their family territory in a tomb occupied by their ancestors. In other words, the tomb provided identity. Suriano writes:

> The family tomb is important because the ancestors are located within its confines. The concern is one of identity. ...the living identify with the tomb through kinship terminology. This is consistent with the words used for ancestors in the Hebrew Bible...Death is relational, and as such, the afterlife ideal in the Hebrew Bible is largely based on kinship identity.[115]

It was common practice for the surrounding cultures to respect and offer sacrifices to the dead for the purposes of appeasement, protection and the hope of receiving a physical or spiritual blessing. However, God, not the ancestors, was seen as the protector of his people. The Israelites most certainly venerated their ancestors and may have followed some of the veneration practices around them. But as a whole, they did not worship their ancestors as deities.[116] In fact, God identifies himself quite frequently as the God of your Fathers. When he does so, rather than evoking a response of worship toward them, he is highlighting his power, love, and faithfulness to

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[112] Ibid., 163.

[113] Biblical examples include Gideon's ephod and his burial in the family tomb (Judg 8:22-32); Jephthah's ill-fated sacrifice at his home (Judg 30:40); the story of Micah's idols (Judg 17) and Elkanah and Hannah's yearly journey to Shiloh (1 Sam 1:3), all imply that worship was happening in the household.

[114] Hallote, "Real and Ideal Identities," 108.

[115] Suriano, *History of Death*, 202.

[116] J. P. Jupp, "Ancestor Worship" in *LBD,* ed. J. Barry *et al.* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos.

them; attributes of himself that the people too can count on. "And in doing this, God is directing worship to him only, not the ancestors, since he is living and the author of life."[117] As we have noted, Jesus interpreted God's identifying of himself to Moses from the burning bush as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as an assurance of life after death.[118] The commandment to honor (*kabēd*) your father and mother (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16) "may refer to the filial obligation to maintain ownership of family property with the ancestral tomb so as to provide 'honor' after death as well as in life."[119] In the book of Ruth, Boaz married Ruth "in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown" (Ruth 4:10 NIV). Evoking the names of the ancestors honored God by reminding the people of his covenantal promises.

The HB discouraged any sort of communication with the ghosts of the dead (1 Sam 28:3-25). With the exception of Saul, there is no hint of contact with or worship of the foundational ancestors for help of any kind.[120] The biblical stories reinforced that God's people need only to rely on him, both in life and the afterlife. The belief in life after death was expressed "in situating the dead in a comfortable dwelling equipped with the essential material necessities for a continued existence."[121] In their care of and identification with their ancestors, the biblical people were included in the family of the living God, and all the blessing that accompanied it.

[117] My thanks to Dr. Douglas Buckwalter for this quote.
[118] Exod 3:6; Mark 12:18-27.
[119] Bloch-Smith. *Judahite Burial Practices*, 111-12.
[120] Saul consulted the witch of Endor in order to seek advice from Samuel (1 Sam 28). This episode was condemned in the text.
[121] Ibid., 19.

2.4 *Sheol*

Sheol (*šĕʾôl*) is often defined as: "The Hebrew term for the place where the dead go."[122] No other culture or religion shares this term, nor is its etymology known. Therefore, the contribution of comparative studies for illuminating the topic of *Sheol* is limited.[123] Unfortunately, scholarly discussions concerning *Sheol* tend to center on its etymology rather than its meaning. Johnston aptly notes:

> Since the underworld was a widespread concept in the ANE, it is remarkable that Hebrew has a name for it which is virtually unique. Whether intentional or accidental, this allowed the Israelites and their writers to invest the term with their own religious outlook, without the conceptual baggage that other shared terms might carry.[124]

Monotheism, most certainly, shaped the understanding of *Sheol* for the biblical writers in much the same way as it influenced their thanatology. The many gods of the underworld are dismissed, as were the cults of the dead, necromancy, and the mythicization surrounding death. YHWH claimed dominion over everything, and that included *Sheol*.[125] Just as the Hebrew writers distanced themselves from the epics, thanatologies, and burial practices of the surrounding nations, so too did they develop a unique understanding of the underworld. Our focus will be on the contribution that a fuller understanding of *Sheol* offers toward a theology of life after death in the biblical narratives.

The term *Sheol* (*šĕʾôl*) occurs sixty-six times in the HB. There are twenty-one instances in psalmodic literature, including Hannah's song (1 Sam 2:6) and David's Song (2 Sam 22:6); twenty

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[122] Walton, *ANE Thought,* 302.

[123] Walton, *ANE Thought,* 302. Walton notes that while "it is difficult to make any conclusive statements about the details of life in Sheol the author [Isa 14:9-11] is quite successful in conveying the idea that it is not particularly pleasant. In this sense it is very similar to the picture of the netherworld in Mesopotamian literature" (brackets mine).

[124] Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 79.

[125] Barr, *Garden of Eden,* 32.

occurrences in wisdom literature, including Moses' Song (Deut 32:22); and seventeen times in prophetic texts. There are a mere eight uses in narrative texts. With the exception of one instance all occur in direct speech.[126] Sheol, then, is most often used in literature that is emotive. Johnston notes that: "It is entirely absent from legal material, including the many laws which prescribe capital punishment or proscribe necromancy. This means that '*Sheol*' is very clearly a term of personal engagement."[127]

It is significant to note that *Sheol* is never used in a death narrative, where one would expect to find it, if it is the fate of all humans. It is of equal note that the word occurs so infrequently in the OT, especially in light of the emphasis on the underworld in the surrounding nations.[128] These observations are not surprising when one considers that the HB is the story of the living God, who is the God of the living.

Johnston has classified the uses of *Sheol* according to its main emphasis in each text. He finds that the most frequent use is to indicate human destiny. Other emphases include, cosmological extremity; the underworld generally, as a place of confinement or existence or personified; and escape. Cosmological use, underworld description, and personification are not important biblical themes, hence the few uses of *Sheol* in those contexts. Ironically, according to Johnston, it is on those three emphases that scholarship has chosen to focus.[129] This undoubtedly has contributed to the denial of a theology of an afterlife in the OT, for it mistakenly equates *Sheol* with the pagan underworld. Interpreting the unique term *Sheol* using comparative studies is

[126] Johnston, *Shades of Sheol,* 71. The eight narrative occurrences are Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; Num 16:30, 33; 1 Kgs 2:6, 9.

[127] Johnston, *Shades of Sheol,* 72.

[128] Ibid., 72. Johnston notes that "the stem 'die/death' (*m-w-t*) occurs one-thousand times, but there are only about one hundred references to the underworld (using Sheol or a synonym)."

[129] Ibid., 80.

problematic. *Sheol* is a very minor theme in the HB, and is not synonymous with the pagan underworld — a major theme in ANE religions.

Sheol is seen predominately as the destiny of the ungodly in the narrative texts. The rebellious Korah, Dathan and Abiram "went down alive into *Sheol*" after they rose up against Moses (Num 16:30, 33). David implored Solomon on his deathbed to punish Joab for spilling innocent blood, by not allowing "his gray head go down to *Sheol* in peace" (1 Kgs 2:6), and Shimei for cursing him, to "bring his gray head down to *Sheol* in blood" (1 Kgs 2:9). The other four uses of *Sheol* in the narrative texts are found in the Jacob story. When *Sheol* is ascribed to a righteous person it always "speaks in the context of extreme trial, whether loss, illness, affliction or abandonment."[130] As such Jacob exclaims upon hearing the news of Joseph's supposed death, "I will go down mourning to my son in *Sheol*" (Gen 37:35). The loss of Benjamin would "send my [Jacob's] white head down to *Sheol* in grief" (Gen 42:38; 44:29, 31). However, when Jacob actually dies, *Sheol* is never mentioned.

Lewis notes that "*Sheol* is associated with the concept of premature or 'evil death,' which was distinguished from the common fate of all humans. On the other hand, natural death is accompanied by unification with kin, and *Sheol* is never mentioned in these contexts. Nevertheless, its most common usage is a place for the wicked."[131]

As we have seen, a proper burial in the ancestral tomb is the desired end for the biblical people. It is an important practice in the OT. *Sheol*, on the other hand, is rarely mentioned. It is associated with anguish and is seen as the unwelcomed fate of the wicked. No person is ever said to die and descend to *Sheol*. Most importantly, it is not used to describe the fate of all humanity

[130] Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 81. This is often the case in the Psalms. See Suriano, *History of Death*, 223-48, for a survey of Sheol in the Psalms as a liminal space.

[131] Theodore J. Lewis, "The Abode of the Dead" in *AYBD* 2, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 104

after death.[132] *Sheol* is unique to the Hebrew people, and as such infused with its own meaning that acts to separate it from the pagan concept of the underworld which they understood to be the fate of all humans after death.

Wolff agrees that the stories of Enoch (Gen 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2:3-5) inform the biblical people that God's faithfulness and his steadfast love cannot be ended by death.

> Before YHWH, according to this notion [God's taking of Enoch and Elijah], there is not only the alternative between this life and the shadow existence in the world of the dead; there is a third possibility—a permanent, living fellowship with him.[133]

We propose that the biblical stories provide ample evidence to support Wolff's statement. The stories of Enoch and Elijah offer a hint of ongoing life that will be reimagined in the narratives of Rachel, Moses and David.

2.5. Summary

In order to realize a theology of death to life in the HB, we have explored the anthropological, socio-cultural and archaeological background from which the text arose. We have interpreted this data using a theological lens, for the Bible presents itself as the story of the living God who has made himself and his purposes known within these skillfully written stories.

The traditional anthropological approach to biblical holism as being monistic or ontological, effectively eliminates the possibility of a theology of an afterlife. However, we have shown that a theological understanding of holism as functional has created space for just such a theology. The nuanced understanding of Hebrew terms, such as *rûaḥ* and *nepeš,* that contain a

[132] Johnston, *Shades of Sheol,* 82-83. Johnston argues that in regard to Ps 89:48-49 and Eccl 9:7-19, neither of these texts should be understood as speaking of a destiny for all humankind. The former refers to "a context of widespread divine judgment and the later to Qohelet's "reflection on the absurdity of observable life… it is not the book's final word."

[133] Wolff, *Anthropology,* 109.

range of meanings including a reference to something not part of the physical body that survives death, points to a fluid holism that allows for post mortem existence. The doctrine of the Trinity illustrates the concept theologically.

A brief survey of the epics and thanatologies of Mesopotamia, Canaan and Egypt indicate that their understanding concerning the origin of humans is reflected in their beliefs about death and the afterlife. The biblical writers were able to distance themselves from the epic by writing their stories in prose. They turned the epics on their ear by presenting biblical stories with echoes of the epics that are infused with theological meaning. The thanatologies of the ANE were incompatible with monotheism. The covenant people of YHWH were not to be fixated on death, but on life.

Current trends in scholarship are moving away from comparative studies to interpret burial practice of the biblical people. The burials in the Judahite highlands in MBA-IA were unique. The use of the cave tomb followed by the bench tomb, along with the Israelite practice of caring for the bones of the deceased have theological implications that speak to a theology of death to life.

Finally, *Sheol* is a term that is also unique to the Hebrew people. As such the biblical writers were able to infuse it with theological meaning. The concept of the underworld was a major theme in the cultures of the ANE. However, the biblical writers rarely speak of *Sheol*. It is also conspicuously absent from any death narrative. Therefore, *Sheol* should not be understood as synonymous with the underworld. In the narrative texts, the eight uses all refer to the fate of the unrighteous in the afterlife or a righteous person in grave emotional turmoil.

A theological interpretation of socio-cultural, comparative and archaeological material is foundational for our study. This must be accomplished by sifting the biblical texts through the foundational data surveyed in the opening chapters with a theological understanding of life after

death embedded in the stories of the HB. Keeping these topics in mind, we will now turn to the Rachel narrative, and the theology of death to life skillfully embedded within her unique story.

Chapter 3
A THEOLOGY OF DEATH TO LIFE IN THE RACHEL STORY

3.0 Introduction

We have noted that it is the general consensus of many biblical scholars that there is little, if any, clearly defined theology of life after death in the HB. Ideas concerning life after death were thought to have developed over a period of time, emerging much later — during the exilic and post exilic periods. We have also observed that the writers of the OT expressed divine reality and truth through the medium of history.[1] The way in which they told the story of their historical encounters with God and the literary mechanisms used speak to the meaning of the text.[2] As such, the authors have skillfully embedded within the text, meaning that would not be apparent if the facts were simply recorded chronologically. That being said, might scholars be missing important clues about ancient Israel's understanding of life after death that were woven quite early on into the biblical stories?

When approaching the biblical narratives, it is important to remember that the manner in which a story is told "often becomes the avenue of greater insight into the theological, religious and even historical significance of the text — *what* the story means."[3] Therefore, the use of poetics has impacted the historical study of the Bible by bringing to light the fact that many texts perceived by historical critical analysis as contradictory, unnecessarily repetitive, and the like, are in truth

[1] Routledge, *Old Testament Theology,* 245.
[2] Long, *Art of Biblical History*, 43.
[3] Ibid., 43.

narrative devices used by the biblical writers to communicate theologically, and in their circles, quite clearly.[4]

In this chapter, we will explore the death narrative of Rachel, as described in Gen 30:1; 35:14-20; and 48:7. We shall see that these texts contribute to the overarching theme of death to life in the biblical account of salvation history. They offer hope and indicate a belief in the afterlife. We will examine the historical/cultural uniqueness and significance of this text. Rachel is the first woman recorded in the HB to die during childbirth. She is a matriarch and a much beloved primary wife at that, all of which highlights the theological importance of the event.

Literary techniques such as key words, structure, inclusio, and repetition, as well as the use of death language will be addressed. Through this careful reading of the text, we will discover and unpack three foreshadowings of Rachel's death, and three allusions to an ongoing afterlife. We will encounter a theology of death to life within Rachel's story that the biblical people would have understood. This means, the biblical writers were conveying as normative within these texts a theology regarding ongoing life after death that reflects the character of the living God who dwells within and transcends the process.

3.1 Foreshadowing of Death

At first blush it appears that the story of Rachel and Jacob will be a romance of epic proportion, when the conniving trickster Jacob meets his match in the beautiful schemer Rachel. Isaac instructs Jacob to return to Paddan-aram and choose a wife from the daughters of Laban (Gen 28:2). During his journey the LORD appears to Jacob in a dream and renews the covenantal promises of land and descendants (28:13-14). Jacob arrives at his destination and stops at the local well. There he

[4] Long, *Art of Biblical History*, 52. As noted in the ch. 1, the scholarly emphasis of historical, source, and other 'higher' criticisms detracted from poetic analysis and understanding of the text it provides.

happens to meet Rachel, daughter of Laban. Jacob exhibits superhuman strength and passion by moving the stone from the mouth of the well for Rachel to water her flocks. He kisses her and weeps aloud from emotional joy (29:11).[5] This must be the woman through whom God intends to bless Jacob with descendants. However, careful reading of the text foreshadows trouble to come.

3.1.1 First Foreshadowing of Death: Give Me Children or I shall Die

Our story opens with an obvious contrast between Jacob's search for a bride and that of Rebekah for Isaac. Unlike the servant of Abraham who journeys to Haran to secure a wife for Isaac, praying for guidance in choosing (Gen 24:13ff.), Jacob bases his choice on Rachel's outward appearance (29:10, 17). Laban's presence and actions echo back to his greedy, manipulative behavior in the past (24:29-30).[6] Laban successfully tricks Jacob in a manner reminiscent of Jacob's own deception of his father. In this case however, the older is substituted for the younger, an irony certainly not lost on Jacob.[7] The light of morning reveals that Jacob has unwittingly married Rachel's older sister Leah. After waiting out the bridal week[8] Jacob then marries Rachel whom he "loved more than Leah" (29:30) and finds himself indentured to Laban for a further seven years.

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[5] Waltke, *Genesis*, 401.

[6] Gen 24:29-30: "Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he hurried out to the man at the spring. As *soon as he had seen the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms* [given to her by Abraham's servant], and *heard Rebekah tell what the man said to her,* he went out to the man and found him standing by the *camels* near the spring (TNIV). Alter, *Five Books of Moses,* 121 notes that this scene is a "brilliant moment of exposition of character. The narrator makes no comment about what kind of person Laban may be. His sharp eye on the precious gifts surely invites us to wonder about him…Hovering suspicions about Laban's rapacity will be confirmed many decades later in narrated time in the course of his slippery dealings with Jacob." Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* WBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 146 contrasts Rebekah's virtue with the "grasping materialism" of Laban. Verse 30 reveals Laban's actions are motivated by greed and not hospitality. Wenham sees this thought reinforced by the final reference to camels, that "were in this time period a rare and luxurious type of transport."

[7] John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary,* LBI (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 194.

[8] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *IVPBCOT,* 62. The bridal week may have its origins in the seven-day Creation. Hopefully, new life would be created during this seven-day period at the beginning of the marriage. The bride and groom would have nothing to divert them from the process of "creating." Leah, however, does not become pregnant during that time. It was not until God opens her womb that she conceives.

It is tempting to view these second seven years as an echo of the seven days of Creation. During these years Jacob fathers eleven sons and one daughter.[9]

It is God, the great giver of life, who opens and closes wombs. He opens Leah's womb after seeing that she was unloved (29:31). She bears four sons then stops having children for some unknown reason. One can only speculate why, but perhaps Jacob excused himself from his conjugal duty for Rachel's sake.[10] Meanwhile, Rachel, who is loved, remains barren. Here she speaks for the first time in the text. Generally, a character's initial spoken words within a story serve to define or characterize them.[11] Despite the fact that Rachel has been present in the narrative for more than ten years, this is her first speech. It echoes the first speech of Esau who also demands something from Jacob because he was at the point of death (25:30, 32). As we shall see, it characterizes her later rash behavior in stealing her father's household gods. Likewise, true to form, is the conniving Jacob's defining first speech: "First sell me your birthright" (25:31).

Envy of her sister and the social disgrace[12] associated with barrenness becomes too much for Rachel to bear. Alter aptly observes that "the prevalent ancient Near Eastern view [was] that a woman's one great avenue to fulfillment in life was through the bearing of sons."[13] Using very few words, the text powerfully communicates her anguish. "Give me children," cries Rachel, "or I shall die" (30:1 ESV). Here we have the first of three foreshadowings that Rachel may not enjoy long life, for ironically, she is destined to die in childbirth. Furthermore, through Rachel's speech,

[9] Waltke, *Genesis*, 407. Waltke points out that eleven children born within seven years attests to the fact that the births were not successive and that two or more of the mothers must have been pregnant at the same time.

[10] Robert Alter, *Five Books of Moses; A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004), 160. Alter argues that the idiom for sexual intercourse used by Leah in Gen 30:14, "with me you will come to bed," is ordinarily used for a man's first sexual encounter with a particular woman and would indicate that Jacob had not been sleeping with Leah. This could also be the reason behind Leah's accusation that Rachel had "taken her husband" (30:15).

[11] Ibid., 158.

[12] Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 28. "Female sterility" was considered a disgrace in ANE culture.

[13] Alter, *Ancient Israel,* 242 (brackets mine).

the biblical writer has skillfully linked the symbolic ongoing of life through children with death. Levenson supposes that the pattern of death reversed by birth is found in many OT stories:

> It's earliest attestation (in terms of literary order, whatever the chronology of composition) lies in the folk etymology of Adam and Eve's third son, whom Eve names Seth [*šēt*], meaning God has provided [*šāt*] me with another offspring in place of Abel, for Cain had killed him' (Gen 4:25). Twenty-three generations later, Judah…loses two sons, the second because of a refusal to fulfill the levirate requirement 'to provide offspring for his brother' (Gen 38:9) … Judah inadvertently fulfills the requirement himself…the man who lost two sons gains twins.[14]

Rachel's death is most certainly foreshadowed by her impassioned words to Jacob, however, the literary link of birth (life) after death between Rachel and other select ancestors[15] is metaphorical for ongoing life after death and offers a "hope and security in the afterlife" that is embedded repeatedly within the OT stories.[16]

3.1.2 Second Foreshadowing of Death: Take Away (*ʻāsaf*) and Add (*yāsap*)

Jacob is incensed by Rachel's demand, for it is God alone who bestows fertility (gives life).[17] Jacob's words: "Can I take the place of God, who has denied you the fruit of the womb?" (30:2), are the only ones he speaks all through these birth narratives fraught with competition between his wives. He does not speak again until after the birth of Joseph.[18] Rachel and Leah command him to consort with their maids (30:3, 9).[19] Rachel sells him and Leah hires him for mandrakes (30:14-

[14] Levenson, *Resurrection*, 116-17.

[15] Instances of life after death symbolized by childbirth include, Eve (Gen 4:25), Tamar (38:27-30), Naomi, (Ruth 4:16-17), the wife of Phinehas (1 Sam 4:19-20), and Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:24-25).

[16] Suriano, *History of Death*, 54.

[17] Gen 30:2. It is interesting to note that Isaac interceded on behalf of his wife Rebekah, who was also barren, and "the LORD responded to his plea" (25:21). In fact, she gave birth to twin (two) sons, which is what Rachel will request.

[18] The silence of Jacob in these narratives highlights the fact that it is God who is the author of life. He, not Jacob, is the one who ordains and ensures it.

[19] K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 325. Kitchen points out that these were "not arbitrary acts." Jacob would have received the maids of his wives upon marriage "precisely so to serve as an insurance policy against the inability to have offspring."

16). He is the passive, silent sperm donor. God, on the other hand, is actively opening and closing wombs, comforting the distressed and answering prayer.

After Jacob's words in Gen 30:2, Rachel immediately gives her maid Bilhah to Jacob, instructing him to "consort with her, that she may bear on my knees[20] and that through her I too may have children" (30:3 JPSTT[21]).[22] Rachel's impulsive scheme does result in the birth of two sons, yet her plans backfire when Leah in turn gives her maid Zilpah to Jacob as concubine, leading to the birth of two more sons. Perhaps Rachel was influenced by the popular belief that adopting the child of a maidservant was a remedy for infertility.[23] Or her choice to give her maid to Jacob could have arisen from the fact that it was a responsibility of the primary wife of a household to produce children.[24]

Rachel's final attempt to conceive a child involves the use of mandrakes, a perennial root which was used as an aphrodisiac and in fertility rites (Song 7:13-14).[25] Leah's son Reuben brings some mandrakes to his mother. Rachel relinquishes Jacob to Leah for the night in exchange for the mandrakes, perhaps to increase her own fertility. Once again it is Leah who conceives and gives birth to two more sons and a daughter. Rachel, who continues to rely on her own devices rather than God, remains barren. Frustrated demands of her husband, the giving of her maidservant and the use of mandrakes all fail to produce life in Rachel. Prayer and a proper attitude toward God as the giver of life eventually lead to blessing. "Now God remembered Rachel; God *heeded*

[20] Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, 159. The placing of a newborn on someone's knees was symbolic of adoption.

[21] *The Jewish Study Bible: Tanakh Translation* [JPSTT] (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). All further translations in this chapter are from the JPSTT unless otherwise specified.

[22] Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 128. The practice of concubinage to ensure the production of children or heirs is well attested in the ancient world; however, in the Nuzi documents it is the husband, not the wife, who puts the stipulation in the marriage contract (ANET, 220).

[23] Ibid, 128. Leah claims that the conception of her fifth son was a reward from God for giving her maid to her husband (30:18).

[24] Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 25.

[25] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *IVPBBCOT,* 62.

her and opened her womb" (Gen. 30:22). She conceives at last, bears a son and names him Joseph (meaning "may he add"), saying: "The LORD has 'taken away' (*'āsaf)* my disgrace.[26] May the LORD add (*yāsap*) another son for me" (30:24). The "taking away" of the disgrace is Joseph's birth and "add" refers to the future son.[27] Waltke, on the other hand, argues that both words refer to the life of Joseph who will be "taken away" and then "added."[28] This speculation is problematic for several reasons. First, every one of Jacob's sons was named by the mother according to a heartfelt circumstance going on in her own life. [29] For Rachel, it was the "taking away" (*'āsaf*)[30] of her disgrace in a culture that placed an extremely high value on a woman's ability to bear children. Second, this is not Joseph's story, but Rachel's. It is Rachel who demanded children or else she would die, and it is Rachel who would die in childbirth, an event not yet experienced in Scripture. As such, the cultural stigma of infertility, as well as Rachel's request for two sons, indicates an understanding of the word play using the similar Hebrew words *'āsaf* and *yāsap* as the second hint of Rachel's early death, for if both words are referring to her, they would be a foreshadowing of the fulfillment of her request ("give me children, or I shall die") stated in reverse order ("I shall die, and be given children").

Finally, and most convincingly, it is interesting to note that the same Hebrew verbal root used for "taking away" Rachel's disgrace is also used in the death narratives of Abraham (25:8),

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[26] I. Cornelius, אָסַף (*'āsaf*) in *NIDOTTE* 1, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 469. Here *'āsaf* "has the meaning 'to gather' in the sense of 'to remove, to take away.'"

[27] Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, 162. Alter compares the naming of Issachar by Leah to Rachel's naming of Joseph as both having double etymologies. "Leah's double etymology for Issachar had referred in sequence to conception and birth. Rachel's double etymology refers to birth and, prospectively, to a future son."

[28] Waltke, *Genesis*, 414.

[29] Gen 29:32-34. Leah named her sons out of feelings that included: the misery of being unloved (29:32-33), praise (29:35), good fortune (30:11), happiness (30:13), a reward from God (30:18), and a sense of honorableness for bearing six sons (30:19). Rachel experienced vindication and answered prayer (30:6), victory over her rival sister (30:7) and deliverance form disgrace (30:23).

[30] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *EBDBHEL,* 62. The meaning ascribed to *'āsaf* is "gathering and taking away," "remove," "withdrawal of reproach."

Ishmael (25:17) and Isaac (35:29).[31] Here *ʾāsaf* is translated as "was gathered." Each man was "gathered to his people" after his death.[32] The fact that the keyword *ʾāsaf* is not used in Rachel's death narrative, but is used in one of her childbirth stories, links ongoing life with the death narratives of the patriarchs. By using the same verbal idea, the writer is able to connect the use of *ʾāsaf* in Rachel's naming of Joseph, with the death language "gathered to his people" so as to contribute to a theology of death to life. Just as Joseph was born, the three patriarchs also entered new life with God when they died.

This wordplay on the Hebrew words for "take away" and "add" are the second foreshadowing of Rachel's death. With the "adding" of her next son, it is her life, and not her disgrace, that will be "taken away." The unique use of the keyword *ʾāsaf*, frequently used elsewhere as a figure of speech for death, in this instance alerts the reader to the ominous threat of death in Rachel's future.

3.1.3 Third Foreshadowing of Death: Dire Prediction

The third hint of Rachel's death embedded in the narrative is found in her theft of Laban's household gods. After Rachel gives birth to Joseph, Jacob asks for "leave to go back to my own homeland" (30:25). Laban attempts to keep him from leaving through nefarious methods which all backfire and lead to further success for Jacob. The LORD instructs Jacob to "return to the land of your fathers where you were born and I will be with you" (31:3). Rachel and Leah agree. Jacob gathers his wives, children, livestock and all of his amassed wealth and sets off for Canaan. Laban does not know that Jacob has "stolen away" (*w-gnḇ*) with his daughters and grandchildren (31:20).

[31] In the story of Rachel's childbearing of Joseph, the Qal stem of *āsaf* is used, whereas the death narratives of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, have the same verb in the Niphal stem, invoking a passive meaning.

[32] Cornelius, "*ʾāsaf*," 470. Cornelius states that "the expression 'to be gathered,' can refer to death, that is 'burial.'" However, in all three of these instances, it is said that the person died, was gathered, then buried, which certainly alludes to a "gathering," after death, prior to burial.

The Hebrew[33] is well translated in the KJV, NKJV, and ASV which have, "And Jacob stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled." Many modern versions translate *w-gnḇ* as "leaving," "fleeing," or "running away" (NIV, TNIV, ESV) rather than "stole away," reading, "Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away." This is unfortunate, for in so doing, the beautiful biblical irony that both Jacob (30:20) and Rachel (30:19) have "stolen" (*w-gnḇ*) from Laban who has stolen from them is missed![34]

Meanwhile Jacob is blissfully unaware that while Laban was out sheep-shearing, Rachel has hidden his stolen household idols in her camel cushion.[35] Furthermore, in true Jacob fashion (for indeed, they are well-matched tricksters), Rachel deceives Laban when he comes looking for the idols saying, "Let not my lord take it amiss that I cannot rise before you, for the period of women is upon me" (31:35). Rachel's clever, resourceful speech prevents Laban from finding the

[33]C.Van der Merwe, *LHEIB* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2004), Gen 31:20. וַיִּגְנֹ֣ב יַעֲקֹ֔ב אֶת־לֵ֖ב לָבָ֣ן הָאֲרַמִּ֑י עַל־בְּלִ֣י הַגִּ֔יד לֽוֹ כִּ֥י בֹרֵ֖חַ הֽוּא.

[34]E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes,* AB (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 245. Speiser notes that the "Hebrew stem *gnb*, which usually means "to steal" … also has other shadings in idiomatic usage. Thus, the very next clause employs the same verb, no doubt deliberately and with telling effect, in this phrase 'lulling the mind,' i.e., stealing the heart" (20). Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 267 points out that the acts of deceit are "underscored by the dense repetition of *ganab*, 'to steal' in its several nuances (31:19, 26, 27, 30, 31, 39)." In addition, even though the word "to steal" is not ascribed to Laban's actions, he stole seven years of Jacob's life (29:30), the speckled flocks he had agreed to give to Jacob (30:34-36), and his daughter's inheritances and bride prices (31:14-16). Speiser, *Genesis,* 245 also observes that "the point in this instance…is that part of the bride payment was normally reserved for the woman as her inalienable dowry. Rachel and Leah accuse their father of violating the family laws of their country."

[35] Alter, *Five Books of Moses,* 169. The household idols or gods were small figurines representing the deities who were responsible for the "well-being and prosperity of the household." Alter alludes to the fact that Rachel may have taken them in order to worship them, but that seems unlikely after her successful prayers to God for a child and her cavalier treatment of the idols. Waltke, *Genesis*, 427supposes there could be a connection between heirship and access to the idols. Sarna, *Genesis,* 216 suggests that "perhaps by appropriating them [she] hoped to deprive her father of the ability to detect Jacob's escape"; perhaps through divination (brackets mine). More likely, however, Rachel was acting out of spite for Laban's behavior toward her sister and herself. Rachel and Leah asked Jacob, "Have we still any inheritance in our father's house? Surely he regards us as outsiders, now that he has sold us and has used up our bride price" (31:14-15). In addition, Laban may be viewed as an "outsider" by the household gods for failing to care for them properly. This agrees with Hamilton, *Genesis*, 295, who argues that "Rachel could have stolen her father's teraphim for their monetary value, motivated by greed, or out of spite, motivated by vindictiveness…Earlier, it was Rachel, the object of Jacob's desire, whom Laban stole from Jacob…Now the tables are turned: it is Rachel who steals from Laban the objects of his desire."

idols that are hidden in the cushion upon which she is sitting.[36] This scene presents a sharp contrast between the God of Jacob and the gods of Laban.[37] Rachel's behavior suggests "an attitude of willful defilement and contemptuous rejection of the idea that Laban's cult objects had any religious worth."[38] Hamilton comments:

> Again, we may imagine the ancient Hebrew hearing this story. Not only can one sit on gods, but such gods can be rendered unclean if they are stained by Rachel's blood. The gods, so crucial to Laban, are reduced to "sanitary towels," or at least a soft cushion on which to rest her body, now weakened by the loss of blood… Rachel's explanation of her situation to Laban is one that her father would be unlikely to question. Thus, the reader comes to the end of the unit…[and] neither he nor we know whether Rachel's claim is true or fabricated.[39]

What we do know, is that Rachel had experienced the opening of her womb by the God who gives life. In addition, she intentionally places Laban's idols in the proximity of the dead, unfertilized flow of her menstrual period.[40] Rachel's act symbolizes through story that God is the living God and the author of ongoing life. After all those years of unfertile menstrual flow, God in his faithfulness brought a dead womb to life — a metaphor for what is to come after death.

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[36] Martin Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (Boston: Gruyter, 2016), 438. "The words used in Biblical Hebrew for a sanitary towel are *dāwā* and *bègèd 'iddīm*. *Dāwā* (Isaiah 30:22, REB: 'foul discharge'; NRSV: 'filthy rags'), *bègèd 'iddīm* (Isaiah 64:5, REB: 'filthy rag' (verse 6); NRSV: 'filthy cloth'), but these modern translations delicately mask the real meaning." For more on the unclean state during menstruation in the ANE, see 438-41. It is interesting to note, as Stol observes, that the negative effects of menstrual blood may be counteracted by the use of mother's life-giving breast milk.

[37] Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel's Story* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 126. Bailey notes that Laban suspects nothing because he cannot imagine how an 'unclean' woman could "possibly be sitting on 'sacred images.'"

[38] Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis,* JPSTC (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 219.

[39] Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 303 (brackets mine).

[40] Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 331. "The loss of vaginal blood…meant the diminution of life, and if unchecked, destruction and death." It is interesting to note a possible memory of Rachels's act in Isa. 30:22: "Then you will desecrate your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold; you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them 'Away with you!'" Regardless of whether or not Rachel was indeed menstruating is beside the point. What is significant is that she has no qualms about suggesting such a location for the gods, which she would no doubt never deign to suggest of YHWH. Here the author skillfully takes the opportunity to belittle idolatry through the words and actions of Rachel.

Unaware that it was Rachel who had taken the idols and that his words place her in grave peril, Jacob proclaims, "But anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive!" (31:32). Wenham observes that "what Jacob has unwittingly done is to pass the death sentence on his favorite wife, and so for the reader who, unlike Jacob, knows that Rachel has the teraphim, the story reaches its dramatic high point."[41] As a result of her action, Rachel's death is once again foreshadowed, for it is she who is in possession of the gods and who will not remain alive.

3.2 Allusions to Life after Death

We have seen that there are three foreshadowings of Rachel's death in the text. The initial hint lies in Rachel's rash, first words: "Give me children or I shall die." The second instance is in the naming of her son Joseph and the accompanying wordplay associated with the naming. The third allusion is observed in Jacob's impulsive promise to Laban. Each foreshadowing suggests that regardless of how much Jacob loves Rachel and would attempt to keep her safe, it is God's plan that she meets an untimely end. Yet embedded in the language of Rachel's death narrative are three allusions to continued life after death. The reader may rest assured that the living God intends ongoing life for his people.[42]

3.2.1 First Allusion to Life after Death: Barrenness, El Shaddai, and Progeny

Laban and Jacob come to terms and make a pact. Jacob "took a stone and set it up as a pillar." They gather stones, creating a mound or heap, and partake of a meal (Gen 31:45). Jacob makes peace with his brother Esau and finally proceeds to Shechem in the land of Canaan. At Bethel,

[41] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 276.

[42] Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 46 states: "Yahweh was supremely the Lord of life. His very name indicates life, and he is repeatedly celebrated as giver and sustainer of life. In choosing to follow Yahweh, Israel chose life itself." Although the concept of "heaven" as we understand it is absent from the theology of life after death embedded here, perhaps the nature of an afterlife included an ongoing existence in the presence of YHWH and the ancestors. We shall see that burial practices and death language metaphorically support that conclusion.

God reestablishes his covenant with Jacob who erects a pillar at the site (35:14) and then moves on. It is here we first learn that Rachel is pregnant (35:16). Scripture is silent in regard to the conception of this child, which is surprising in light of the fact that the conception of each of the other sons and Dinah were all noted. A close reading of the texts before and after Rachel's death, which are filled with allusions to ongoing life, will reveal our first hint of a theology of death to life in Rachel's story. Perhaps the significance of the omission of the conception of Rachel's second child lies in the preceding pericope, where Jacob has a significant encounter with God and then erects the second pillar at Bethel.[43]

Here, God appears to Jacob and blesses him once again (35:9-15). He identifies himself not as the LORD, the God of Abraham and Isaac[44] as he did at the first pillar (28:18), but as El Shaddai (35:11), which is the principal name for God used by the patriarchs. The etymology of this ancient name for God has been the center of much controversy.[45] The common English translation "God Almighty" is derived from the translation of the Hebrew in the LXX and Vulgate, but is by no means certain.[46] Waltke cites the most probable meaning as, "The Powerful, Strong One," basing it on the root word *šdd,* or the "One Who Suffices" from *še* and *day.*[47] However this name for God always appears in the context of fertility or offspring in Genesis (17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14 and 48:3). As such, regardless of the exact meaning of the word, "Shaddai evokes the idea

[43] Kitchen, *Reliability of the Old Testament,* 328. The form and content of patriarchal worship is seen only during episodes where they receive divine promises. It contains practices that are found only in the patriarchal narratives (stone altars at the site where YHWH's name is called upon and pillars, which were unique to Jacob); practices that would later become frowned upon.

[44] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 222 notes that this title for God (the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac) occurs only here in the OT. "Here the combination of 'the LORD' with 'the God of Abraham' indicates that the God known to the Patriarchs was indeed the same God who revealed himself to Moses."

[45] Lisa W. Davison, "El Shaddai" in *EBD,* ed. David Noel Freedman *et al.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 403.

[46] Ibid., 403.

[47] Waltke, *Genesis,* 259.

that God is able to make the barren fertile and to fulfill his promises."[48] It would seem that in this context the name does indeed have to do with fertility, for Jacob sets up the pillar (35:14), names the site Bethel (v. 15) and in the next verse we learn that Rachel is pregnant. God has exhorted Jacob: "I am El Shaddai, be fertile and increase; A nation, yea an assembly of nations shall descend from you. Kings shall issue from your loins" (v. 11). This son will be the only one born in the land to Jacob. And the first king of Israel, Saul, will come from him. By announcing Rachel's pregnancy here, we see that El Shaddai is still in control of opening wombs and bringing forth life, even at the brink of death.

Rachel's is the first death in childbirth recorded in Scripture.[49] An initial event in Scripture is always worth closer examination. Death in childbirth is unique in that it is a death that results in the beginning of a life. The fact that it occurs for the first time to the favorite wife of a patriarch — a founder of the people — is significant. As we have noted above, the lives of the ancestors of the Hebrews are foundational for understanding their relationship to God as his chosen people. Consequently, they are normative for the Israelites.[50] With this in mind, we will turn to Rachel's death narrative with an eye toward a theology of death to life recorded for us in Gen 35:16-20.

> They set out from Bethel; but when they were still some distance short of Ephrath, Rachel was in childbirth, and she had hard labor. When her labor was at its hardest, the mid-wife said to her, "Have no fear,[51] for it is another boy for you." But as she breathed her last – for she was dying – she named him Ben-oni: but his father called

[48] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 20; Alter, *Five Books of Moses,* 339, suggests "mountain" or to do with fertility.

[49] The second, and only other death in childbirth recorded in the OT, is the death of the wife of Eli's son Phinehas, who "when she heard that the Ark of God was captured and her father-in-law and husband were both dead, she was seized with labor pains, and she crouched down and gave birth" (1 Sam 4:19-20). It is interesting to note that the midwife responded in the same manner in both stories. As with Rachel, the death to life motif carries on at the birth of the son which occurs as the result of the deaths of three people. However, unlike Rachel's death narrative, there is no "breathed her last" language. The text reports that "she did not respond or pay heed."

[50] Sarna, *Understanding Genesis,* 197 states that; "No other people, as far as is known, had a genealogical concept of history. Clan, tribal and national relationships are expressed through the ascription of common ancestry to a single individual, the eponymous ancestor."

[51] Baker and Carpenter, CWSDOT, 470. The Hebrew word used here is *yare* meaning to fear, or to be afraid. It is the same word used when referring to the "fear of the LORD" and in that case means to respect, to reverence, to be awesome.

> him Benjamin. Thus Rachel died. She was buried on the road to Ephrath – now Bethlehem. Over her grave Jacob set up a pillar; it is the pillar at Rachel's grave to this day.

The text specifies that Rachel had "hard labor." The concept of difficult, painful toil in childbearing harkens back to God's judgment in Gen 3:16. Rachel is the first woman recorded in the HB to experience the dire consequence of Eve's disobedience.[52] The concept of increased difficulty in childbirth links Rachel to Eve, "the mother of all the living" (3:20). We have proposed that after the Fall, immortality is achieved metaphorically[53] as well as physically through progeny.[54] The midwife's words of comfort represent the mindset of a culture that continued in this belief. Her words are as if to say; "Do not fear death, you will live on in this son; he is a sign that you too will live on." Rachel's name for her son speaks to this understanding. She names him Ben-Oni,[55] which means "son of my vigor (*ōwnî*)." Alter aptly conjectures that "in her death agony, she envisages the continuation of 'vigor' after her, in the son she has born."[56] In her weakened and dying state she sees the vigor of her life transferred to and living on in him, as well

[52] In fact, this is the first reference to any discomfort associated with childbirth in the HB. Women simply bore (וַתֵּלֶד) children (Eve, Gen 4:1-2; Sarah, 21:2). Rebekah enquired of the LORD as to why "the babies jostled within her," only to discover that she was to have twins (25:22-23). However, it is never mentioned during the actual birth of the twins, when one might expect it, that there was any accompanying "hard labor" (25:24-26).

[53] Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011), 30. Bailey observes that to understand metaphors in the biblical text as mere illustrations is to "miss much of what the Middle Eastern author is trying to say. Middle Easterners *create meaning* through the use of simile, metaphor, parable and dramatic action."

[54] Waltke, *Genesis*, 94. Moses' song to the people includes: "You deserted the Rock, who bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth" (Deut 32:18). God gave birth to a people who are a living metaphor for ongoing life.

[55] Baker & Carpenter, *CWSDOT*, 1130. This is the only use of *ōwnî* in the HB. It is a "proper noun designating Ben-Oni." Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996*,* 199 states that the name Ben-Oni "can be construed to mean either 'son of my vigor' or, on somewhat more tenuous philological grounds, 'son of my sorrow.'" The LXX has "son of my sorrow." Speiser, *Genesis,* 274 argues that the sense of "my vigor" is supported by the orthography, but the context favors "suffering or misfortune." However, since Rachel's greatest wish was for another son, it hardly seems likely that she would consider herself unfortunate to get one. And "son of my vigor" is much more in character with the tenacious Rachel. In this case, it is best to adhere to the most orthographically supported translation, that is "son of my vigor.".

[56] Alter, *Genesis*, 199.

as continuing within herself after death. This notion is reflected in Jer 31:15 where Rachel is said to be actively (vigorously?) weeping and refusing to be comforted for her children.

Further allusions of ongoing life after death through childbearing in Rachel's story can be found in Gen 48:3-7, years after Rachel's death:

> Jacob said to Joseph, "El Shaddai[57] appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and he blessed me, and said to me, 'I will make you fertile and numerous, making of you a community of peoples; and I will assign this land to your offspring to come for an everlasting possession.' Now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, no less than Reuben and Simeon. But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be recorded instead of their brothers in their inheritance. I [do this because] when I was returning from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, while I was journeying in the land of Canaan, when still some distance short of Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath"— now Bethlehem.

Joseph brings his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh to visit his father Jacob, who is ill and nearing death. Jacob reviews his encounter with God just prior to Rachel's death, including the promises of land and many descendants. Jacob reckons Joseph's two sons as his own. Any offspring born to Joseph after them will belong to the territory of the brother (Ephraim or Manasseh) in which they live. Then, Jacob makes a poignant connection between his appropriation of Joseph's sons as his own and his recollection of Rachel's death (48:7). He links the theophany with its promise of descendants and land (vv. 3-4), and the acquisition of two sons to Rachel. Her life was cut short, robbing her of the opportunity to bear more children. However, by procuring Joseph's sons as his own, they become Rachel's as well — posthumously! Rachel's prayer for another son is answered twice, with the addition of two more sons.[58]

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[57] El Shaddai is translated "God Almighty" here, in a passage that obviously, as discussed above, has to do with fertility.

[58] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 630. Alter, *Five Books of Moses,* 278 observes that "Jacob reverts obsessively to the loss of Rachel, who perished in childbirth leaving behind only two sons, and his impulse to adopt Rachel's two

Furthermore, Jacob's deathbed blessings of Rachel's first son Joseph, and his sons, are brimming with allusions to fertility of the soil and body (48:16, 19; 49:22, 25-26). Joseph names his son Ephraim, meaning, "God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction" (41:52). Ironically, Ephraim, who came from barren Rachel, will become the most fruitful tribe.[59] Rachel's heartfelt plea; "give me children or I shall die" in her death became "give me children and I shall live." Her sons are noted, above all the offspring of Jacob, to be blessed with fertility, both in soil and progeny. Rachel continues to bear life even after her death. Embedded in the story of her death is a vital theology of ongoing life.

3.2.2 Second Allusion to Life after Death: Language of Death

The term "to breath one's last" is unique to the death narratives of Abraham, Ishmael, Rachel, Isaac and Jacob in the Hebrew Bible.[60] The language used to describe Rachel's death, she "breathed her last" is *yāṣā*ʾ+ *nepeš*. "With → *nepeš* or → *rûaḥ* as object, *yāṣā*ʾ means "breathe one's last." [61] The Hebrew word for the other four differs from that of Rachel.[62] The narratives of the patriarchs and Ishmael use the Hebrew word *gāwa';* "a prim. root; to *breathe* out, i.e. (by impl.) *expire*: —die, be dead, give up the ghost, perish."[63] In these narratives, *gāwa*' is used in a repeated formula with *mût,* meaning "to die or expire"[64] and is "apparently from a root meaning to breathe

grandsons by her firstborn expresses to compensate, symbolically and legally, for the additional sons she did not live to bear."

[59] Waltke, *Genesis*, 612.

[60] This phrase is also used to describe Jesus' death in Mark 15:37, 39 and Luke 23:46; *ekpneó*: to breathe out, expire. These are also the only three uses in the NT.

[61] H. D. Preuss, יָצָא in *TDOT*, rev. ed., vol. 6, eds. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, trans. D. E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 230.

[62] The JPSTT, NIV and TNIV interpret *yāṣā*ʾ+ *nepeš* as "breathed her last," whereas the ESV, NASB, NET, NKJV and the NRSV have "her soul was departing (for she was dying.)". However, we have demonstrated in ch. 2, 2.2.2.5 that *nepeš* does mean "soul" in some, but far from all, contexts and that it is strongly related to breath. As such a departing soul certainly implies a last breath in this instance.

[63] Strong, CDWGTHB 2, 26.

[64] This combination is used in the narratives of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac.

out."[65] As such, there is a reference to the last breath implied in both phrases. We shall demonstrate that the use of two different Hebrew terms to convey the same meaning (last breath), one unique to Rachel, is suggestive of a theology of death to life in her story.

Crucial junctures in the lives of biblical characters occur in narrative episodes which include formulas or predetermined motifs. Alter refers to these episodes as biblical type-scenes.[66] If circumstances are altered, for example, details added or omitted from the standard formula of the scene, one should take notice. The variation is designed to communicate something to the audience.

The deaths of Abraham, Ishmael, Rachel, Isaac and Jacob occur in a symmetric or chiastic pattern. Dorsey observes that "symmetry generally features two sets of units, in which the units of the second set match in reverse order the units of the first set… there is often an unmatched central unit linking the two matching sets: a-b-c-b'-a'."[67] A closer look at the structure of the death narrative type-scenes of those whose language references his or her final breath, and their literary variations, offer our second hint of an embedded theology of an afterlife in the Rachel story.

Abraham's death is an ideal one.[68] It is the scenario most desired by the biblical people and as such, highlights God's relationship and goodness to Abraham. He lives to a good old age and receives a proper burial by his two sons. He is gathered to his kin, signifying an ongoing relationship with the past. The importance of his burial site cannot be overstated. Abraham's death

[65] Baker and Carpenter, *CWSDOT*, 194. As noted above in the death of the son of the widow of Zarephath, it was his lack of breathing that determined the fact that he was dead.

[66] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* 51. He identifies the most common biblical type-scenes as: "the annunciation… of a birth hero to a barren mother; the encounter with the future betrothed at a well; the epiphany in the field; the initiatory trial; danger in the desert…, and the testament of the dying hero. An interesting look at the well motif in the betrothal scene is found on pp 52-62.

[67] Dorsey, *Literary Structure,* 30 goes on to write, "The term *chiasm* or *chiasmus* derives from the crisscross shape of the Greek letter chi (X)." The following A B C A' B' structure of these five death narratives is my own. However, I am indebted to Dr. David A. Dorsey, and his work *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, for his contribution to biblical studies, most particularly, finding theological meaning in the structure of the text.

[68] Waltke, *Genesis*, 341.

story is told in five verses. However, an entire chapter is devoted to the story of the purchase of Sarah's, and consequently his own burial site, the cave at Machpelah.[69] His purchase of property in a land other than his place of origin establishes his status as "the founder of a people and religion and of the possession (by proprietary interment) of a particular territory…"[70] Most importantly, God's faithfulness is exhibited through the fulfillment of his promise to Abraham of ownership in the land.

> **a** This was the total span of Abraham's life: one hundred and seventy-five years. And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was gathered to his kin. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, the field that Abraham had bought from the Hittites; there Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife. After the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac. (Gen 25:7-11)

Ishmael, Abraham's son by Sarah's Egyptian maid Hagar, is the second death to be described using the term "breathed his last." However, his death narrative differs in significant ways from that of Abraham.

> **b** These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names by their villages and by their encampments: twelve chieftains of as many tribes. These were the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years; then he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his kin. They dwelt from Havilah by Shur, which is close to Egypt, all the way to Asshur; they camped alongside all their kinsmen. (Gen 25:16-18)

There are several clues in this narrative that mark Ishmael's death as not good or blessed. First, despite the fact that there is mention of a long life-span, he is not said to have died at a ripe old age or that he was content. Secondly, he is not buried by his sons and in fact there is no mention of a burial at all which is dishonoring to him.[71] Ishmael is "gathered to his kin," but the text appears

[69] Genesis 23. Waltke, *Genesis,* 391, notes *t*he site is located NE of Hebron.
[70] Davies, *Death*, *Burial and Rebirth*, 96.
[71] Ibid., 21.

to separate him from Abraham and to align him more with Hagar the Egyptian. Hence Ishmael is not seen as gathered to the same kin as Abraham.[72] Finally his offspring are not landed and are noted to be in proximity with Egypt, which would certainly carry negative associations.

The next death recorded using the "breathed her last" motif is Rachel.

> **c** They set out from Bethel; but when they were still some distance short of Ephrath, Rachel was in childbirth, and she had hard labor. When her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, "Have no fear, for it is another boy for you." But as she breathed her last – for she was dying – she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. Thus Rachel died. She was buried on the road to Ephrath – now Bethlehem. Over her grave Jacob set up a pillar; it is the pillar at Rachel's grave to his day. (Gen 35:16-20)

Rachel's death narrative, of course lacks the old age factor. Yet it does contain the birth of a son (legitimate kin) and a proper burial by her husband, that includes a memorial.

Isaac is the next patriarch to die and his death narrative is strikingly similar to Abraham's.

> **a'** And Jacob came to Isaac at Mamre, at Kiriath-arba – now Hebron – where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. Isaac was a hundred and eighty years old when he breathed his last and died. He was gathered to his kin in ripe old age; and he was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob. (Gen 35:27-29)

Isaac's passing has all the makings of a good death. He dies at a ripe old age and receives a proper burial from his sons. His contentment was perhaps marred by his battling sons who were far from the pleasing, compliant son he had been to Abraham!

The death of Jacob is the last recorded death in the HB using the "breathed his last" formula. The narrative is significant both for what it includes and for what it lacks.

> **b'** Then he [Jacob] instructed them, saying to them, "I am about to be gathered to my kin. Bury me with my fathers in the cave which is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave which is in the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre, in the land of

[72] Waltke, *Genesis*, 344. See Gen. 25:12.

> Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site – there Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah – the field and the cave in it, bought from the Hittites." When Jacob finished his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and, breathing his last, he was gathered to his people. (Gen 49:29-33)

Jacob's lengthy instruction to his sons repeats the story of the purchase of the burial site at Machpelah by Abraham and thus assures Joseph and all his sons that they are legitimately tied to the land which God had promised. Their sojourn in Egypt would be temporary.[73] Jacob's age at death was recorded earlier (47:28) as one-hundred and forty-seven years. However, his life-span is not recorded at his death. Also lacking from his death narrative are the words "he died," which are in all of the other four narratives. He was simply "gathered to his people."[74] This is a notable omission, for the technique of leaving out "he died" has already been used in one particular genealogy in Genesis. The genealogy from Adam through Lamach (father of Noah),[75] names the son of the line being traced, the number of years the man lived, the fact that he begot other sons and daughters, and ends with the phrase; "and then he died."[76]

Unexpectedly, with the death of Shem, the formula changes. As noted earlier, a change or variation in a standard pattern is meaningful. This literary alteration is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that God chooses the Semites to be the people of the promise. From Shem to Terah (father of Abraham),[77] the genealogy notes the number of years they lived, the name of the son whose line is being traced and ends with the words, "and had other sons and daughters." Absent for the first time in a genealogy is the phrase "and then he died." The line of the Semites, with no

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[73] Alter, *Five Books of Moses,* 290.

[74] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50*, 689. Hamilton points out that the verb "died" is absent in 49:33, stating: "The emphasis is not on dying, but on rejoining." We will be looking more closely at the death language "gathered to his people" in our study of the death of Moses.

[75] Gen 5:3-31. The death of Noah is recorded elsewhere in 9:28.

[76] The exception is Enoch, "who did not die, but was no more, because God took him away" (Gen 5:24).

[77] Gen 11:10-24. As with Noah, Terah's death is recorded elsewhere in 11:32.

mention of death, appears to be one of perpetual life. So too does the death of Jacob who has been renamed Israel – the people of the promise. The line of Shem and the death of Jacob, that both lack the phrase "and he died," speak to a theology of eternal life.[78]

The Biblical authors utilized the technique of word repetition in skilled and extraordinary ways. The Hebrew language lends itself to the use of keyword repetition by nature of its structure and has led scholars to recognize this technique in the biblical text by the term, *leitwortstil* (leading-word style). Alter defines a *leitwort* (leading-word) as "a word or word-root that recurs significantly in a text, in a continuum of texts, or in a configuration of texts: by following these repetitions, one is able to decipher or grasp a meaning of the text."[79]

Rachel's death is tied to that of the patriarchs, as we have seen above, through the concept "breathed his/her last." All of these narratives contain a root word associated with the final breath at death. The Hebrew root word in the Rachel narrative is unique to her. As such, not only is the use of a root word implying a dying breath a significant part of the use of a *leitwort*, "the very difference of words can often intensify the dynamic action of the repetition."[80] It is a powerful method of conveying meaning to the text. The concept of "breath" and "breathing" harkens back to the creation of man where the breath motif begins. "The LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into the nostril the breath of life, and man became a living being" (2:7). The Hebrew word translated "blew" in this passage is *nāpah* a verb "indicating to blow, to breathe, to boil. It is used of projecting one's breath."[81] The Hebrew word for "breath" is *n^{e}šāmā* a noun

[78] Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews,* NIBC, ed. W. Ward Gasque (Peabody: Henderson, 1990), 102-103. Hagner expresses the rabbinic understanding of Melchizedek that "the surprising silence of Scripture about the lineage and the birth and death of Melchizedek…is seen to be significant rather than fortuitous…Because there is no record of his death…the conclusion can be drawn that he remains a priest forever." In the book of Heb 7:3 Melchizedek is declared to be living since there is no record of his death.

[79] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* 92-92

[80] Ibid., 93.

[81] Baker and Carpenter, *CWSDOT,* 743.

meaning "breath, wind, spirit. Its meaning is, at times, parallel to *nepeš* (used in the Rachel account) and *rûaḥ*."[82] It is understood that such breath originates with God; it is the source of life that vitalizes humans."[83] From Gen 2:7 we learn that the creation of man was a two-step process. The body was formed from the dust of the earth, then was animated by God. It is man alone who is described as having life "blown into his nostrils by God himself. He became a living being, drawing directly from God, his life source."[84] When God pronounced judgment upon Adam and Eve he said, "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (3:19). If the physical body returns to its source, should not the life force as well whether it be for judgment or reward? The author of Ecclesiastes would seem to agree: "and the dust returns to the ground as it was, and the lifebreath (*rûaḥ*) returns to God who bestowed it" (12:7).[85] The *leitwort* of "breath" at Creation is connected to the patriarchs and Rachel (as Matriarch) at their deaths, for they are the foundational people of God who model a destiny of ongoing life after death. It is not by accident that their deaths are described in this way. The fact that the word for "breathed her last" in the Rachel account is different from those of the others mentioned, highlights her death which alone brings forth life. Without ever mentioning the afterlife, the skillful use of these keywords speaks to the belief in it for Rachel. God took away (*'asaf)* her disgrace with the birth of Joseph. The added birth of Benjamin results in her life force (*nepeš*) going away (*yāṣāʾ*) to its source.

As mentioned above, in the Rachel account two Hebrew terms are combined to communicate "breathing her last." *Yāṣāʾ* a verb meaning "to go out or to come in" is coupled with *nepeš,* defined as "the breath, the inner being with its thoughts and emotions, the animating force

[82] Baker and Carpenter, *CWSDOT,* 1040: *rûaḥ* meaning spirit, wind, or breath "is used to refer to the Spirit of God or the Lord."

[83] Ibid.*,* 758.

[84] Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 14.

[85] See also Ps 104:29; 146:4.

of a person…as a composite whole,"[86] The Hebrew verb *yāṣā'* is used in many settings and contexts and is nuanced by those settings. "It can refer to the birth and coming out of a child (25:26) or as one's soul or life, going out, or away in death (35:18)."[87] It is interesting to note, and certainly purposeful, that this same word used to describe Rachel's death is used to portray Jacob's birth! Indeed, it speaks further to the death to life theology in Rachel's death narrative. The coming out of the life of her husband at birth is echoed in the going out of hers in death. She is being born into life anew after death.

Before turning to our third allusion, we must question why Ishmael is included with the other four? The literary links certainly warrant it. As son of Abraham, Ishmael is important, but his separate genealogy distances him from the line of the promise and the divine blessings that accompany it.[88] It is tempting to see Ishmael as a foreshadowing of the gentile nations who will someday be included as God's people. A "mixed multitude went up with" the Israelites from Egypt at the Exodus, and if they became circumcised were allowed to partake of the Passover and thus become covenant people (Exod 12:38, 44). However, Sarah's words to Abraham, "for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac" (21:10), would seem to speak against that view. We propose that perhaps Ishmael is included with this group for structural purposes. There are five instances of death language referring to a "last breath" in Gen 25:7-49:33. The first and fourth uses (25:7-11; 35:27-29) in the chiastic structure, Abraham (a) and Isaac (a') are virtually identical. They contain the same keywords: breathed his last, died at ripe old age, gathered to his kin and burial by sons in the family burial site. The second and fifth (25:16-18; 49:29-33), Ishmael (b) and Jacob (b') share: breathed his last, mention of sons (more than two),

[86] Baker and Carpenter, *CWSDOT,* 746.
[87] Baker and Carpenter, *CWSDOT,* 462.
[88] Waltke, *Genesis*, 344.

and gathered to their people. However, unlike Abraham and Isaac, Ishmael records no dying at a ripe old age or good life but simply that he died. Jacob also has no record of ripe old age or good life, nor "and he died." Thus, Ishmael records no life and Jacob no death. Rachel (c) as the third death (35:16-21) with "breathed her last" stands unmatched in the center. She alone bears life at her death, and has a stone sepulchral marker. It is her narrative that ties together the "breathed his/her last" motif and connects it to Genesis by the use of the keyword *nepeš* (2:7). Thus, Rachel is highlighted by the parallel structure of these five accounts, and the unique language in her death narrative. It is her death that results in life. Close reading of the text reveals a story infused with a theology of death to life.

3.2.3 Third Allusion: Pillars of Stone

Stone pillars (*massebah*) or standing stones served as boundary markers and as memorials for remembrance of events or covenants.[89] Moses erects twelve pillars to commemorate the twelve tribes of Israel at the reading of the covenant (Exod. 24:4). They also indicate the presence of God (Gen 28:22).[90] Use of these pillars in Canaanite worship to represent their deities would be adopted by the Israelites and condemned by the biblical writers.[91] It is significant to note that cultic pillars were thought to be receptacles for the spirits of the Canaanite deities and that they symbolized fertility.[92] As such, perhaps this is a case where the biblical writers have reimagined a pagan fertility image as a theological symbol of ongoing life after death. Jacob erects four pillars. Two

[89] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *IVPBBCOT,* 64.

[90] R. A. Compton, "Rock" in *LBD,* eds. J. D. Barry *et al*. (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), "Rocks also serve as metaphors for God. Numerous passages attribute the qualities of a rock—strength and firmness—to God. This occurs in the Pentateuch (e.g., Deut 32:4, 15–18), the Former Prophets (e.g., 1 Sam 2:2; 2 Sam 22:2–3, 32, 47; 23:3), the Latter Prophets (e.g., Isa 17:10; 26:4; 44:8), and especially the Psalms (e.g., Ps 18:2, 31, 46; 62:7; 78:35; 89:26)."

[91] Jennie Ebeling, "Pillars," in *EBD,* ed. D. N. Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1059.

[92] Ibid., 1059. "These stones were associated with the Canaanite god Baal and were possibly erected alongside a wooden pillar symbolizing the female deity Asherah, they may have in some cases been phallic symbols."

of them commemorate God's theophany and his covenant promise of ongoing life through offspring (28:18-9; 35:14-15).[93] One serves as a boundary marker (31:51-52) and the other as a gravestone (35:20). Close reading of the text reveals that the first and last pillars serve as an inclusio for the Rachel story. The third and fourth bracket her death.

The parallel structure[94] of the pillar accounts is helpful for gaining insight into the death to life motif in the Rachel narrative, and serves as our third hint of a theology of an afterlife. The repeated mention of *massebah* bracketing, and twice within the Rachel and Jacob narrative is significant. They provide a structural framework for their story. The first pillar occurs just prior to their first meeting and the last just after their final separation. The second commemorates the birth of a nation and the third is full of allusions to fertility. Keywords, phrases, and actions surround each pillar, tying them to one another to form a framework which speaks to meaning, as illustrated by this parallel structure (a-b-a'-b'):

a First pillar (28:1-30:21) Actions of Jacob result in threat to his life and Jacob sets out.

- God speaks to Jacob; Jacob sleeps with head on a stone and dreams of angels of God on stairway
- God identifies himself as YHWH God of Abraham and Isaac; covenantal promise of descendants and land; I will not leave you; surely God is present
- Jacob sets up stone[95] as pillar; names site Bethel; removes stone from well for Rachel whose identity is revealed
- Rachel says "give me children or I will die"
- God blesses Jacob with livestock, sons and daughter

[93] Waltke, *Genesis*, 393.

[94] Dorsey, *Literary Structure*, 28. Parallel arrangements "generally feature two sets (or panels) of units, in which the units of the first set are matched in the same order by those of the second set (a-b-c|| a'-b'-c')." Dorsey notes that although parallel arrangements are often difficult to discern, the repetitions make the material easier to recall as well as "provide an opportunity to do such things as compare, contrast, reiterate, emphasize, explain and illustrate" (29).

[95] G. Wallis, יקץ. in *TDOT*, rev. ed. vol. 6, eds. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, trans. D. E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 277. "The next morning, he sets up the stone on which his head had rested, an act that makes it possible to understand the interpretation of the dream. The dream experience must invade the waking realm, over which it takes precedence, for it is the domain, shrouded in mystery, in which God has free rein."

b Second pillar (30:22-33:20) Son born to Rachel. Jacob's interest protected.

- Jacob returns to native land as instructed by God
- Rachel steal's Laban's (foreign) gods (idols), Whoever stole them will not live.
- Jacob sets up pillar and mound which acts as boundary marker between Laban (Mesopotamia) and Jacob (Israel), signifying birth (boundary) of a nation; Jacob renamed Israel
- relationship with Esau reconciled
- all live

a' Third pillar (34:1-35:15) Actions of sons and daughter of Leah result in threat to life and Jacob sets out.

- God speaks to Jacob; go to Bethel, get rid of foreign gods
- Jacob buries foreign gods; terror of God (God's presence) falls upon towns
- Jacob builds alter[96] renames site El-Bethel because here God revealed himself
- Rebekah's nurse (cares for children) Deborah dies
- God blesses Jacob with blessing of Abraham and Isaac: Land and descendants. Jacob sets up pillar and renames site Bethel

b' Fourth pillar (35:16-29) Son born to Rachel. Jacob's interest not protected.

- Jacob moves on in land
- Rachel dies (does not live)
- gives birth to a son; Rachel names son, son renamed by Jacob. Rachel buried on rode to Ephrath (not in Machpelah tomb).[97] Jacob sets pillar at her grave
- relationship with Reuben broken
- Isaac dies

[96] Tenney, *ZPEB* 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 520. Stones were important in the life of the biblical people both symbolically and practically. They were plentiful in the rocky environment and were used for building altars, monuments and dwellings. The Law of Moses, which was their life, was written on stone tablets. God instructs Moses to bring forth life-giving water for the thirsty people in the wilderness from a rock (Exod. 17:6). Isaiah uses a stone as a metaphor for a living person; "He shall be for a sanctuary a stone men strike against: A rock men stumble over" (Isa. 8:14), and again in Isa. 28:16. So too does the Psalmist; "the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone" (18:22). Peter interprets these passages as referring to Christ. He calls Jesus "the living Stone," precious to God, and we "also like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood…" (1 Pet. 2:4-7). The stone pillars in the Rachel narrative are associated with on-going life, remembrance, and the presence of God. They speak to eternal life for the one who trusts in the precious living Stone, will never be put to shame (1 Pet. 2:6). Stones most certainly contribute to the death to life theology in the Rachel narrative

[97] Benjamin D. Cox and Susan Ackerman, "Rachel's Tomb," *JBL* 128 (Spring, 2009), 135-48. One would expect that Rachel, as favored wife, would be buried in the family tomb at Machpelah. Cox and Ackerman argue, largely based on sociological evidence from cultures such the Ingorot people of the Philippines, the Nigerian Kalabari, the Bariba of Benin, Kpelle of Liberia and more, that Rachel was buried separately due to the manner in which she died. "The anomalous way in which the biblical authors treat Rachel's burial is the result of the particular *means* by which her death was thought to have come about, in childbirth" (140). Much of their cultural evidence hinges on the fact that a woman giving birth is isolated, because of this threatening liminal state. However, this was not so with the Hebrews, where a mid-wife is always present during an actual birth narrative (Gen 35:17; 38:28; Exod 1:15-17; 1 Sam 4:20) and the sting of death is countered by the birth of a child. Rachel's separate burial site is better determined theologically. It enhances her contribution to a theology of life after death, and makes way for the mother of the line of the Messianic promise (Leah, the mother of Judah) to occupy that place in the tomb.

It is interesting to note that after both Bethel accounts (a, a'), Jacob has an encounter with Rachel. Thus, their first and last meetings are associated with pillars. The stone which Jacob removes from the mouth of the well (29:10) ties this story to the first stone pillar (28:18).[98] During both occasions at Bethel God promises numerous offspring; "descendants like the dust of the earth" (28:14) and then "an assembly of nations shall descend from you" (35:11). After the first pillar, Rachel's womb is closed just as the well is closed by a stone. Yet God has promised many children to Jacob. Eventually Rachel does bear a son. It is only after this event, perhaps because through the birth of the son Rachel is now bound to him,[99] that Jacob decides to return home. Laban comes looking for his stolen idols and ultimately an agreement is made between Jacob and Laban. A mound and pillar are erected as a witness. The second pillar acts as a boundary marker between Mesopotamia and Israel and in essence commemorates the birth of the land of Israel.[100]

Just as the first pillar was erected after Jacob flees for fear of death, so the third pillar (a') which is also at Bethel, is erected after Jacob is forced to flee because of deaths perpetrated by Leah's sons. As with the first pillar at Bethel, death (or fear of it) leads to the promise of life. Jacob gets rid of any foreign gods that may be among his people, signifying that he chooses the LORD God as his God, just as he vowed to do at the first pillar. Inserted into the narrative, just prior to God's blessing is the death of Rebekah's nurse, Deborah. There is much speculation concerning why this event is recorded and also why here.[101] Waltke, among others, argues that Rebekah's nurse and not Rebekah is memorialized by noting her death as a sort of punishment for her

[98] Waltke, *Genesis,* 399. Stones are an ongoing motif of the Jacob story. Alter, *Five Books of Moses,* 153 argues that "the well in the foreign land is associated with fertility and the otherness of the female body to the bridegroom; it is especially fitting that this well should be blocked by a stone, as Rachel's womb will be 'shut up' over long years of marriage."

[99] Waltke, *Genesis*, 417.

[100] Alter, *Five Books of Moses,* 175, who argues that "the story of bitter familial struggle is also made an etiology for political history. What Laban is designating here is clearly an international border."

[101] Speiser, *Genesis,* 270 argues that "this notice may have been displaced." Alter, *Five Books of Moses,* 195 claims "there is not enough evidence to explain what this lonely obituary notice is doing here."

deception of Isaac.[102] This seems unlikely as Rebekah enquires of the LORD when the twins were struggling within her and God reveals to her that the younger shall serve the older (25:22-23). God's favorite was also hers, and as such she did all she could to promote his cause! We suggest that Rebekah's death is not mentioned as she is the mother of Israel, the line and name of the promise that brings life. She alone among women has a genealogy (Gen. 22:20-23). Thus, there is a record of her birth and not her death. Perhaps, just as in the genealogy of Shem and the death of Jacob, the lack of a record of her death symbolizes the ongoing life of the nation she birthed.

At any rate, the Hebrew word *yānaq* refers to a wet nurse who after nursing and weaning a child has a continued responsibility to rear and serve as its guardian. She may be considered an esteemed member of the family.[103] Perhaps this obituary is placed here in order to correspond to Rachel's rash statement uttered after the previous Bethel pillar (a); "Give me children or I shall die." The one who provided life-giving sustenance and life-long care for a child has died. It also foreshadows the later references to Rachel in Jer. 31:15 as she, the perpetual mother (just as a wet nurse stays with the child for life) continues to mourn for her children. In any case, the nurse dies and as far as we know, Rebekah, the mother of Israel, whose death is not recorded, lives on.[104] She is not mentioned again until Jacob, when giving instructions for his burial, mentions that Rebekah is buried in the family tomb with her husband Isaac, Abraham and Sarah (49:31). Therefore, she is accorded an honorable burial with the patriarchs in the land purchased by Abraham.

[102] Waltke, *Genesis*, 473.
[103] Waltke, *Genesis*, 332.
[104] It is interesting to note that the death of Leah is also not recorded in Scripture. All of the deaths of the matriarchs in some way contain a theology of death to life. It was the death of Sarah that initiated the purchase of the ancestral tomb, a place of perpetuity and symbolic life in the land. Neither Rebekah nor Leah has a death narrative, and as we have seen in the genealogy of Shem, the death narrative of Isaac, as well as the case of Melchizedek, this technique is metaphoric for ongoing life.

The pillar Jacob erects over Rachel's grave is the first recorded sepulchral monument in Scripture.[105] Absalom would later erect one in the King's Valley as a monument to himself, for he said, "I have no son to keep my name alive" (2 Sam. 18:18). Thus, to be remembered in this way was to live on. The concept of being remembered was crucial to the biblical people. When God remembers his people, he always acts. Remembering is not just a casual thought. Herschel notes that remembering is to "literally re-member the body, to bring the separated parts of the community of truth back together, to re-unite the whole. The opposite of re-member is not forget, but dis-member."[106] Rachel will not be buried in the patriarchal tomb with Jacob. However, she is given a distinct and honorable burial and it is her son Joseph, whom God will use to save the family from death by starvation and provide a fertile place for the children of Israel to be fruitful and multiply. And it is Joseph who receives a double inheritance which is the right of the heir.[107]

Absent from the patriarchal death narratives is any hint of the Mesopotamian attitudes and beliefs concerning the purpose of the pillar, altar or tomb. These pillars and altars are reminders of God's faithfulness, not objects associated with anxiety producing rituals of appeasement. Pillars could never contain YHWH. Rather they bring to mind his faithfulness and ability to perpetuate ongoing life. The tomb is not the gateway to the Underworld, but an assurance of God's faithful, powerful ability to fulfill his covenant promise of land. They connected one to one's ancestors, not for worship, but to ensure the patrimonial estate. This was "honoring your father and mother that you may long endure on the land that the LORD your God is assigning you" (Exod 20:12). The tomb served as a symbol of ongoing relationship between the living and the dead.[108] Contrary to

[105] Bruce Waltke, "Rachel's Tomb" in *ZPEB* 5, ed., Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 25.

[106] A. J. Heschel, *Man is Not Alone* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1951), 61.

[107] 1 Chron. 5:1-4.

[108] Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel,* LAI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 365.

the Mesopotamian belief that death is a final destination of no return, the text associates these structures with ongoing life.

There are several verbal links between the death of Rachel and her memorial pillar and the pillar at Bethel which precedes her death. Jacob sets up "a pillar at the site where He [God] had spoken to him, a pillar of stone" (Gen 35:14). God's speech to him included: a name change, God identifying himself as El Shaddai, commands to be fertile and increase, promise of nations and kings from his loins, and land. After Rachel's death, "over her grave Jacob set up a pillar" (35:20). The scene includes: a child born whose offspring will produce a king, a name change (the only example of a father naming a child in Scripture) and a parcel of land named. The stone or pillar motif is routinely associated with Jacob; however, Rachel is also in proximity to them all. In fact, the first stone pillar Jacob sets up is linked to Rachel through the stone he supernaturally removes from the well. Furthermore, he erects no more after her death despite his presence in the narrative off and on until his death fourteen chapters later. Motifs of this type in Scripture may take on meaning through the context of the narrative and may be "incipiently symbolic."[109] The narrative of Rachel is laced with hints of death. Yet at the beginning and end of her story and surrounding her death stand memorials of life and remembrance. What is more, she develops in stature and importance after her death through Joseph, Ruth, Samuel, Jeremiah, the Gospel of Matthew,[110] and her burial site.

When Boaz, the kinsman redeemer, took Ruth as his wife "so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate…[Ruth 4:10], the people and the elders answered, 'May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the

[109] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 95.

[110] "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more" (Matt 2:18 NIV). The Evangelist cites the fulfillment of Jer 31:15 in the killing of the baby boys in Bethlehem at Herod's orders (2:16-17)

House of Israel! Prosper in Ephrathah and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem! And may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah – through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman,'" (Ruth 4:11-12). This blessing commemorates the Matriarchs (naming Rachel first) and her burial site. Knowledge of her burial site was common in the time of Samuel. Ironically, Samuel anoints Saul (the Benjamite) as king and then informs him that: "When you leave me today, you will meet two men near the tomb of Rachel in the territory of Benjamin" (1 Sam. 10:2). Rachel's "hard labor" and difficult childbirth are used by Jeremiah as an analogy for the painful despair of the people in exile: "Thus says the LORD: A cry is heard in Ramah – wailing and bitter weeping – Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children are gone" (Jer 31:15). Rachel's grave remains a site of pilgrimage for Jews and Christians to this day.[111] Jacob said the one who stole Laban's idols "will not live." However, through the motif of the memorial pillar Rachel does live on. Her memory and legacy grew deeper in the minds of the people after her death. The pillars, made of natural, strong, and lasting stone are symbolic metaphors for the eternal life she lives.

[111] M. F. Nyberg, "Rachel's Tomb" in *LBD,* ed., J. D. Barry *et al*. (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos. The exact location of Rachel's burial has long been contested. Gen 35:19 indicates that Rachel was buried in the tribal territory of Judah. However, 1 Sam 10:2 locates her tomb at Zelzah in Benjamin. Jer 31:15 links Rachel's tomb with Ramah. The associations of Rachel's tomb with both Benjamin and Judah may reflect the power struggle between these two tribes throughout history. David (Judah), who supplanted Saul (Benjamin), resulted in the tomb being associated with David's birthplace, Bethlehem. Discrepancies may also be due to editing of the text. Sarna, *Genesis*, 408 argues that the differing accounts in Genesis and Samuel are due to the fact that both Bethlehem in Judah and Kiriath-Jearim in Benjamin were associated with the clan of Ephrath (1 Chron 2:50–51). He also observes that Jacob's next destination after burying Rachel was Migdal-eder, a site identified with Jerusalem (Micah 4:8). Thus, if Rachel was buried near Bethlehem, Jacob would have backtracked northward after her burial. If she was buried near Kiriath-Jearim, he would have continued southward toward Hebron. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 326 based on his translation of Gen 35:16, "some distance short of Ephrath" (JPSTT) as "about two hours' distance from Ephrath," Wenham locates Rachel's tomb in Benjamin along the main road north of Jerusalem near El-Ram. He observes that this location can be identified as *Ramah*. Sered, "Rachel's Tomb," 8 makes a case for accepting the long tradition of pilgrims, since at least the fourth century AD, as locating Rachel's tomb along the Jerusalem-Bethlehem Road. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 386–87 observes that Matthew 2:18 places Rachel's tomb near Bethlehem. Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (London: T and T Clark, 2004), 24–25 notes that the addition of "to this day" (Gen 35:20) usually serves as an indicator that the narrator is explaining the origin of a name or phenomenon that still exists and may be adding credence to the story by noting evidence their present audience can access.

3.3 Summary

The foundational story of Rachel and Jacob is pivotal in the history of the biblical people. Jacob is renamed twice by God as Israel, and this name will become synonymous with the people. The covenant promises would no longer be transferred from God to one man, but rather to the nation that would arise from Jacob's sons born in this narrative. As such, their stories are theologically important. We have looked closely into the death narrative of Rachel in order to understand what God was revealing about death, the afterlife and himself in this artfully written story.

Rachel's death is foreshadowed three times. Her first words "Give me children or I shall die" (30:1) is our first hint that for Rachel, childbearing may be fatal. The second foreshadowing is located within the wordplay found in Rachel's naming of Joseph (*yôsēp)*: "God has taken away (*'āsaf*) my disgrace...May the LORD add (*yôsēp*) to me another son" (30:23-24). At her death, in reverse order, a second son is added and Rachel is taken away. The final foreshadowing is found in the words Jacob speaks to Laban concerning the idols Rachel has stolen: "But if you find anyone who has your gods, that one shall not live" (31:32).

However, God is the God of the living. He is primarily El Shaddai to the patriarchs, a name that is usually associated with fertility and ongoing life. As such, there are three hints of immortality embedded within the story. First, it is significant that Rachel's death alludes to life both before and after she dies. Jacob has an encounter with El Shaddai immediately prior to the announcement of Rachel's second pregnancy. God reiterates his covenantal promise of numerous descendants. Following her death, two more sons are ascribed to her and the tribe that comes from her posthumously is the most prolific. The second allusion is noted in the language used in her death. It ties her to Eve, "the mother of all the living," as well as to the patriarchs. The language of "breathed...last" in the death narratives of Abraham, Ishmael, Rachel, Isaac, and Jacob, are

worded and structured in such a way as to highlight Rachel's death — the only one that produces life. Lastly, stone pillars surround Rachel's story and her death. The structure of the pillar accounts and the significance of stone for lasting memory also speak metaphorically to ongoing life. The contribution of Rachel's death narrative toward the formulation of a theology of the afterlife in the OT cannot be overstated. It speaks to God's overall plan for salvation and eternal life that will be brought to fruition in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus. As such, Rachel can be viewed as a Christ-type. She was beloved, she leaves her father to go to a foreign land, she suffers and dies, and at her death Rachel brings forth life.

The story of Rachel is easily and often subsumed into the Jacob story. Indeed, this is often true of the narratives of biblical women. This is most unfortunate, for the stories of women, as the bearers of life, have much to offer toward imagining a theology of death to life in the OT narratives.

Wenham notes that throughout the Jacob cycle and certainly in the Rachel narrative "there is a tension between the present reality and future hope. The partial fulfillment of the promises in the patriarchal era makes the reader look beyond that era to his own time to see how much more fully had come true."[112] Our perspective has enabled us to see the full picture that our forebears could only glimpse in part. Just as Jesus recognized a theology of life after death in the OT story, a theological interpretation of the text allows us to see that God's revelation to the biblical people was enough for them to entrust themselves to the God of life in death.

[112] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 330.

Chapter 4
A THEOLOGY OF DEATH TO LIFE IN THE MOSES STORY

4.0 Introduction

No other mortal has come closer to experiencing the intimate, personal relationship with the living God than Moses, the great prophet and lawgiver. "YHWH would speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another" (Exod 33:11). It is through Moses that God would choose to perform his most significant act in the HB — the Exodus[1] — which culminates in the giving of the Law of life, the fulfillment of the promise of the land, and the birth of a nation. Hence it is not surprising that the death of Moses should be unique and in close proximity to the presence of God in a way never to be duplicated.

The opening verses of the book of Exodus set the stage for the birth of Moses. They are brimming with allusions to fertility and life and as such serve as a sort of narrative prologue for the living words that Moses will mediate from God to his people. Hamilton observes that Exodus does not begin where Genesis ends.[2] Rather, Exodus harkens back to the genealogy of Jacob (Gen 46:8-27). Genesis 46:8 reads, "These are the names of the Israelites, Jacob and his descendants, who came to Egypt." The writer then goes on to list the sixty-six persons who relocated to Egypt

[1]The Exodus event and its many allusions to a theology of death to life is worthy of a study of its own. As such, it will be discussed only tangentially in this ch. Levenson, *Resurrection,* 27-28 states that "the Exodus has become a prototype of ultimate redemption…The full activation of God's potential in the foundational past has been transformed into a sign of the still greater activation of his potential…that moves the Jews not merely from slavery to freedom but quite literally from death to life as well."

[2] Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 3-4. He does note, however, that Gen, Exod, Lev and Num, all begin with the word "and," linking the stories together to form "one story, a Tetrateuch."

and adds Joseph, his two sons, and Jacob to equal seventy.[3] Exodus 1:1 states: "And these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each coming with his household." The writer then lists the names of the eleven sons. It is not until Exod 1:6 that the death of Joseph is mentioned, which is a recap of the final verse in Genesis (50:26). This technique succeeds in "arching over the intervening account" (Gen 46:28 - 50:26),[4] which includes the deaths of Jacob and Joseph. Unlike the transitions between Exod 40:38 and Lev 1:1 and Lev 27:34 and Num 1:1, where the next book begins where the previous one left off, Exodus opens with a genealogy of life after the deaths that conclude Genesis.

Furthermore, Exod 1:7, the verse following the mention of Joseph's death, states, "But the Israelites were fertile and prolific; they multiplied and increased very greatly, so that the land was filled with them." Here again, life follows death. Hamilton notes:

> There are numerous places, especially in Genesis, where the words "be fruitful/fertile" (*pārâ*) and "multiply" (*rābâ*) occur together…Of these many parallels, the closest to Exod 1:7 is Gen 1:28, for they are the only two verses among the lot with a sequence of five non-identical verbs ("be fruitful-increase-fill-subdue-rule" and "were fertile-prolific-multiplied-became mighty-filled with them"). "The climax of Genesis 1 is Exodus 1: the divine power to proliferate found its highest expression in the emergence of Israel" (Porten and Ruppaport 1971: 368.).[5]

Sarna observes that "This description of the extraordinary fertility of the Israelite population carries strong verbal echoes of the divine blessings of fertility bestowed on humankind at Creation and after the Flood."[6]

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[3] Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus,* JPSTC (New York: JPS, 1991), 4, notes "The number seventy is usually meant to be taken as typological, not literal; that is, it is used for the rhetorical effect of evoking the idea of totality, of comprehensiveness on a large scale. Thus, in Genesis 10 precisely seventy nations issue from the three sons of Noah, and these constitute the entire human family."

[4] Hamilton*, Exodus*, 4.

[5] Hamilton*, Exodus*, 5.

[6] Sarna, *Exodus*, 4.

The book of Exodus begins with a theology of death to life embedded within the narrative. We shall see that this theology continues in the story of Moses' birth, life, and ultimately his extraordinary death.

4.1 A Theology of Death to Life in the Birth of Moses

The birth narrative of Moses provides several hints that this child is associated with on-going life. In Exod 1:7 we learn that "the Israelites were fertile and prolific; they multiplied and increased very greatly, so that the land was filled with them." God is seen to be life-giving, in control, and more powerful than Pharaoh in all of his attempts to thwart the fertility of the Hebrews. In fact, these attempts are turned against him, for it is not the infant Hebrew boys who will die a watery death, but Pharaoh and his mighty army. And it is from the Nile, Pharaoh's chosen instrument of death, that Moses is rescued by none other than the Pharaoh's own daughter. The captivating biblical irony in this story continues as God orchestrates events in such a way that the mother of Moses is paid by Pharaoh's daughter to care for and nurse her own baby, free from the fear of Pharaoh's edict. In addition, after he is weaned, his mother most likely accompanies him to the palace,[7] providing her with the opportunity to inform him of his Hebrew heritage,[8] of which he is evidently well aware (Exod 2:11).[9]

In addition, the story of Moses' birth contains at least three echoes from Genesis which allude to life. When Moses' mother gives birth to him, she decides to hide him safely away because

[7] Nahum M. Sarna, "The Book of Exodus" in A*YBD* 2, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday,1992) 697-98 notes that "evidence exists for the presence of foreign students, especially Semites, in the royal schools in the Ramesside period." Therefore, we can infer from Exod 2:10 that Moses grew up and was educated in the court of Pharoah.

[8] M. G. Easton, "Moses" in *IBD* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 477.

[9] D. M. Beegle, "Moses (Person): Old Testament" in *AYBD* 4, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 913, states "The narratives of Exod 1:15-2:22…declare that Moses, born during the oppression of a Pharaoh and reared in his court, was a Hebrew from the house of Levi who cared for his own people."

"she saw he was good" (*ṭôḇ'*) (Exod 2:2).[10] This phrase harkens back to Creation and the repeated refrain; "God saw that it was good" (*ṭôḇ'*).[11] Sarna observes that "the birth of Moses is another Genesis, an event of cosmic significance."[12]

Second, it is interesting to note that six women[13] (and no men) are instrumental in saving the life of the baby Moses. Three pairs of two women; the two midwives,[14] Moses' mother and sister, and the Pharaoh's daughter and her servant each participate in the rescue of Moses while in the act of living out their female roles (nurturing, nursing mother**,** protective older sister, powerful princess, and slave).[15] The action of Moses' mother — risking the life of her child to the dangers

[10] Hamilton, *Exodus,* 17 argues that "the basic difference between *kî- ṭôḇ* (how beautiful) here and the frequent use of kî- *ṭôḇ* ("that it [was] good") throughout Gen 1 [*hinnē- ṭôḇ*) is that this Exodus passage includes the pronominal predicate: *kî- ṭôḇ hû'.* To that degree Gen 6:2 is a closer parallel to Exod 2:2 than any of the Gen 1:1 passages: "The sons of God saw that they were beautiful" (*kî tōbōt henna*). However, a pronominal predicate is used in reference to Rebekah in Gen 26:7: "For he was afraid to say 'my wife' thinking, 'The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful'" (*kî tōbōt* [*mar'eh,* to behold] *hî,* as well as in 1 Kgs 1:6 of the 'very handsome' *tō-'ar ṭôḇ hû'* Adonijah. As such, the pronominal predicate is used when *ṭôḇ* is referring to a person, and not a thing, as in Gen 1. Therefore, it is the actual word *ṭôb* and not the pronominal predicate that is the defining factor in determining a close parallel with Gen 1. Furthermore, it would seem so in light of the echoes of the Creation event in Exod 1, just prior to the account of Moses' birth. This agrees with Sarna, *Exodus,* 9 who proposes, "the entire clause stirs immediate association with a key phrase, seven times repeated in the Genesis Creation narrative, 'God saw that ...was good' (*ṭôḇ*). This parallel suggests that the birth of Moses is intended to be understood as the dawn of a new creative era." The word *ṭôb* is used quite purposefully to link Moses to the Creation story and speaks to the theology of death to life in the account of Moses' birth.

[11] Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31 (in v 31 God sees all he has made and declares it "very good," *m^{e}'ōḏ' ṭôḇ'*).

[12] Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1996), 28.

[13] That number will increase to seven with the appearance of Zipporah in the narrative. She will be instrumental in saving the life of Moses twice (Exod 2:15-22; 4:19-26). Many commentators are quick to observe that Moses rescues (the Hiphil of *yāša*) the seven daughters in Exod 2:17; (Hamilton, *Exodus* 34-35; Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture,* NAC 2 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2006), 99-100; Sarna, *Exodus,*12). However, it is doubtful that the lives of the women were being threatened. Rather, they were, as women, forced to give way to the male shepherds. In reality, with the report to their father, and the subsequent offer of hospitality, so essential for survival in the ANE, it was more likely that the actions of Zipporah and her sisters rescued Moses from death. In addition, Zipporah is one of the seven daughters of Reuel, a priest of Midian, thereby doubling the usage of the number seven in her relation to Moses. As such, the theological implication of the number seven, most notably for our purposes the allusion to Creation, are doubled in the stories of the rescue of Moses from death and speak to a theology of death to life.

[14] Although the midwives are not mentioned in the actual birth account, their brave and resourceful defying of Pharoah's edict to kill the Hebrew male infants (Exod 1:15-22) in the immediately preceding pericope allowed for Moses to avoid a watery death in the Nile. In addition, these God-fearing (1:17) women are honored by being named, unlike Pharoah or his daughter. For more on the origin of their names and roles see Hamilton, *Exodus*, 12-14 and Sarna**,** *Exodus*, 7.

[15] Hamilton, *Exodus*, 19. Sarna, *Exodus*, 10 observes the fact "that the princess can personally execute such a contract accords with the relatively high social position of women in ancient Egypt."

of crocodiles, drowning and potential rejection by Pharoah's daughter — exhibits "a desperate commitment of the child into God's hands when all her resources are at an end."[16] As "wet-nurse" to Moses, she would rear him and act as his guardian, and as Sarna notes, "one can be sure that the mother nurtured his mind and character and instilled in him the values and traditions cherished by his people."[17] The sister of Moses "stationed herself at a distance, to learn what might befall him" (2:4), and then resourcefully suggests their own mother as wet-nurse (*'iššâ mêneqet*) (2:7). Ironically it is the slave girl of Pharoah's daughter who fetches Moses from the Nile, thereby rescuing the one who would then rescue the Israelites from slavery. Pharoah's daughter adopts and names "him Moses (*Mōšeh*) explaining, I drew him out of the water" (2:10).[18] Sarna observes:

> The Narrator puts a Hebrew origin for the name into the mouth of the Egyptian princess; unbeknown to her, it foreshadows the boy's destiny. By means of word play, the Egyptian *Mose* is connected with Hebrew *m-sh-h*, "to draw up/out (of water)." The princess explains the name as though the form is *mashui*, "the one drawn out," a passive participle, whereas it is actually an active participle, "he who draws out," and becomes an oblique reference to the future crossing of the Sea of Reeds.[19]

This means, Pharoah's daughter's explanation of Moses' name does not match the actual name as it is written. This wordplay illustrates that the circumstances of Moses' life, beginning with his birth and ending with his death, are controlled by God.

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[16] J. G. Janzen, "Resurrection and Hermeneutics: On Exodus 3:6 and Mark 12:26," *JSNT* 7, no. 23 (1985), 21.

[17] Sarna, *Exodus,* 10.

[18] See Hamilton, *Exodus*, 23-26 for a discussion of the scholarly debate regarding the meaning of Moses' name. Most scholars agree that it is an Egyptian name as numerous pharaohs' names end with *mose*. For example, the first part of the Egyptian name Thut-*mose* is the name of a god and the second part has to do with either the verb *msy,* "to be born" or the noun *ms* "child" or "son." As such, Moses' name retains the second part and deletes the name of a god. Sarna, *Exodus*, 10, argues, "The Hebrew name is of Egyptian origin. Its basic verbal stem *msy* means 'to be born,' and the noun *ms* means 'a child, son.'" He also notes that *mose* is frequently "an element in Egyptian personal names, usually, but not always with the addition of a divine element." Kitchen, *Reliability of the OT,* 296-97 disagrees based on the fact that many Egyptians who were not pharaohs were named *Mose*, and suggests that "the adopting daughter probably names him *Māšû, 'one drawn out,'* which somebody later changes to Mōšeh."

[19] Sarna, *Exodus,* 10.

It is significant that God uses women to rescue Moses from death and ensure his life. Women, through childbirth, illustrate metaphorically the passage from one existence to another. Curran observes that when a child is born, "in a remarkable way, one realizes that one has passed through a period of living that involved all the phases of living and dying and rebirth: the fetal life period."[20] The presence of these women harkens back to Eve, the first woman in Scripture to give birth, so named because "she was the mother of all the living" (Gen. 3:20). They speak to a theology of ongoing life in the story of Moses for through them God delivers Moses from certain death to life.[21]

Finally, the Hebrew word used to describe the basket in which Moses was placed is the same word used for Noah's ark (*têbâh*).[22] Sarna suggests that the use of the word *têbâh* "here underscores both the vulnerability of its occupant and its being under divine protection."[23] God instructs Noah to "make yourself an ark (*têbâh*) of gopher wood; make it an ark with compartments, and cover it with pitch" (Gen 6:14). Exod 2:3 reads: "When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket (*têbâh*) for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch." These two stories contain the only uses of the word *têbâh* in the HB. As such, the link from the vessel that allows Noah and his family to escape death in the Flood account in Genesis to the ark in the Moses

[20] Charles A. Curran, "Death and Dying," *JRH* 14, no. 4 (1975): 254-64.

[21] J. P. Jupp, "Fertility Cults," in *LBD,* ed. J.D. Barry *et al.* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos, observes: "Many ancient cultures developed myths involving fertility, and most ancient myths attribute the creation of the world to a sexual encounter (Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 85). In most of these myths, a mother goddess (as a symbol of fertility) would engage in sexual relations with a male consort." However, in the HB, God controls fertility. The stories of the patriarchs all contain wives with barren wombs that are opened and closed at his discretion. As such, the mythological practices and attempts to enhance fertility in the cults of the surrounding ANE are turned on their ear. Women, created in God's image, bear children that become the people who will bear his name. God ensures ongoing life through women. Embedded within texts concerning ongoing life through childbirth is a theology of life after death. God who miraculously created and sustained life in these stories will continue to do so after death.

[22] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *EBDBHEL* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 1061. The Hebrew word ark, תֵּבָה proposes *chest, box*; and is probably an Egypt. loan-word from *t-b-t*, *chest, coffin*; Exod 2:3, 5; it refers to the vessel in which the infant Moses was laid among reeds. In Gen 7:1, 7, 9, 17, 23; 8:6, 9^{x2}, 10, 13; 9:18; 6:14, 15, 16^{x2}, 18, 19; 7:13, 15, 18; 8:1, 4, 16, 19; 9:10, it is the vessel which saved Noah and his family, with animals, during flood.

[23] Sarna, *Exodus,* 9, reflecting the verb *msy*, "to be born."

story who also escapes death, is unmistakable. Hamilton observes that "two individuals, both major role players in God's plan of redemption, are saved from certain death by drowning by finding salvation inside a *têbâh.*"[24] The ark, with no rudder and thus directed by God, carried the people who would perpetuate the human race after the Flood. Likewise, Moses would not only survive the "flood" of the Nile, he would live to be God's instrument to save his people from the peril of water[25] and mediate the Law of life.

The birth of Moses contains echoes of Creation and the Flood accounts,[26] both of which suggest ongoing life after death.[27] In addition, it is uniquely women, the bearers of life who rescue the baby Moses from death. Sarna observes, "The primary function served by its narration [Pharoah's infanticide edict] is to set the stage for the story of the birth and survival of Moses."[28] It is YHWH who orchestrates ongoing life in the face of what appears to be certain death. The allusions woven into the birth account of Moses contribute to a theology of death to life that will trace through his life story.

4.2 A Theology of Death to Life in the Life of Moses

We have observed that the language which opens the book of Exodus imagines continuing abundant life. The story of the birth of Moses also contains many hints regarding ongoing life. We will now turn to two narrative events in the life of Moses which contain clues embedded within his story that inform a theology of death to life. The episodes we will explore involve the account of Moses' first words (Exod 2:11-14) and his call (Exod 3:1-15).

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[24] Hamilton, *Exodus,* 20.

[25] Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, 312.

[26] Sarna, *Exodus*, 9 notes that "evocation of the Flood narrative also suggests, once again, that the birth of Moses signals a new era in history."

[27] The births of Cain (Gen 4:1) and Abel (4:2) came after the fall and the accompanying loss of access to immortality through the tree of life. Seth is born after the murder of Abel (5:3). Life follows death, just as it did after the flood.

[28] Sarna, *Exodus*, 8.

4.2.1 The First Words of Moses

As noted in the Rachel narrative, the first words of a biblical character are often intended to provide valuable insight into his or her personality and story. Moses' first words foreshadow and set the stage for the circumstances of his death through repetition of the Hebrew root word *nakah*, "to strike."[29] In Exodus 2 Moses strikes (*nakah)*[30] and murders an Egyptian who is striking (*nakah*) a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen (2:11-12). The next day he happens upon two quarreling Hebrews and utters his first words: "Why do you strike (*nakah*) your fellow?" (v. 13). The offending Hebrew retorts: "Who made you chief and ruler over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"[31] Moses realizes that his crime is known. As a result of striking, he must flee the land of Egypt (vv. 14-15). Sarna aptly notes, "the narrator is concerned with the character of Moses and the nature of his commitments. These are illustrated by three incidents that display his moral passion and his inability to tolerate injustice (vv. 11-12, 13, 16-17). It is these qualities that mark him as being worthy to lead the struggle for the liberation of Israel."[32] However, these early encounters, tied together by the keyword strike (*nakah*), hint at the futility of Moses' attempts to help Israel without divine assistance, for here Moses must leave the land of his birth because of improper striking, and ironically, he will be unable to enter the promised land when he improperly strikes again (Num 20:11-12).[33]

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[29] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* 116 notes regarding the repetition of keywords by the biblical authors: "But in biblical prose, the reiteration of key words has been formalized into a prominent convention that is made to play a much more central role in the development of thematic argument than does the repetition of such key words in other narrative traditions. Hebrew writers may have been led to evolve this convention by the very structure of the language, which with its system of triliteral roots makes the etymological nucleus of both verbs and nouns, however conjugated and declined, constantly transparent, and probably also by the idiomatic patterns of Hebrew, which tolerate a much higher degree of repetition than is common in Western languages."

[30] Baker and Carpenter, *CWSDOT,* 732; *nakah*: a Hebrew verb meaning to beat, strike or wound.

[31] Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, 314. This statement is laced with underlying meaning. Moses would indeed be chief and ruler over the people and this would be the first of many instances of the Israelite's "resentment and rebelliousness toward Moses."

[32] Sarna, *Exodus,* 11.

[33] W. H. C. Propp, "Moses" in *EBD,* ed. D. N. Freedman *et al.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 919.

Moses flees to Midian (2:15). Some years later (2:23) God instructs Moses from the burning bush to assemble the elders of Israel and tell them, "So I will stretch out my hand and strike (*nakah*) Egypt with various wonders which I will work upon them; after that he shall let you go" (Exod 3:20). These wonders include "striking" the water in the Nile causing it to turn to blood (7:17), "striking" the dust of the earth which changes it into lice (8:13), hail which "strikes" down everything growing in the Egyptian fields (9:25) and the "striking" down of the firstborn of Egypt (12:12). The Law given through Moses requires that anyone who intentionally and fatally "strikes" another shall be put to death (21:12).[34] Furthermore anyone who "strikes" his father or mother (those who give him life) shall be put to death (21:15).

Numbers 20:1-13 records the compelling story behind the barring of Moses and Aaron by God from entering the land of promise. The Israelites were quarreling with Moses and Aaron because they had no water. God commands Moses to speak to the rock, ordering it to yield its water for the people (20:8). Instead, Moses speaks harshly to the people, takes partial credit for the miracle and "strikes" (*nakah*) the rock. The text appears to be unclear as to what offense Moses and Aaron actually committed that warranted such a punishment.[35] However, careful reading of the text yields some clues. Moses was to exercise his duty as prophet and *speak* the words of God to the rock. God had proven over and over that he was holy and true. Obedience to his words brings life thus speaking God's words would yield life-giving water from the rock. However, just as Moses "struck" (*nakah*) the Egyptian which resulted in death and loss of homeland, he "strikes" the rock and loses the privilege of the Promised Land. Moreover, he will not die or be buried there

[34] Ironically this is exactly the crime that Moses commits in Exod 2:12 when he strikes and kills the Egyptian. It is tempting to think that God's punishment of Moses may have something to do with this crime as well.

[35] For a discussion of theories, see Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 382-85 who cites improper leadership, disobedience, anger apparent in rash words, taking credit for the work of God, and/or violence.

in the company of his ancestors. By punishing Moses for irreverence and disobedience God "showed that everyone must fulfill his commandments, even (especially!) his leaders."[36] Moses seems to make a connection between the responsibility of godly leadership and punishment by association of the leaders for failure to lead properly.[37] When reviewing the Israelite's failure to take the land due to the frightful report of the spies, Moses says, "Because of you the LORD was incensed with me too, and He said: you shall not enter it either. Joshua son of Nun, who attends you, he shall enter it. Imbue him with strength, for he shall allot it to Israel" (Deut 1:37-38). It was Joshua and Caleb who encouraged the people to take the land while Moses and Aaron remained facedown and silent (Num 14:1-9). And it would be Joshua and Caleb alone of that generation who would live to lead the community into the land. They represent the new generation that is "unmarked by faithlessness…[and] contrast between these two and all others is the contrast between faith and faithlessness and consequently, between those who receive the land and those who do not."[38] It would seem that there are conflicting reasons for Moses' ban from the land.[39] Yet it is clear from any account is that the faithless, disobedient generation will not live to enter it.

However, disobedience and death will not have the last word over the one who speaks the words of the Giver of Life. The keyword *nakah* appears in the Numbers narrative as well and speaks to the death to life motif. It vindicates Moses in a sense, for out of the sentence of death outside of the land, Moses speaks for life to God who hears him. The whole community threatens to stone Joshua and Caleb for their attempts to press for entrance into the land. God becomes

[36] Ashley, *Numbers,* 386

[37] Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 105.

[38] Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2001), 32

[39] Alter, *Five Books of Moses,* 884 argues that the change of view from blame being placed on Moses' impulsive striking of the rock to his acceding "to the people's plan to send out spies and was thus implicated in their subsequent guilt…reflects the tendency of Deuteronomy to inculpate Israel." However, it was not the people's plan, but God's (Num. 13:1ff) plan to send the spies. Moses' guilt was in not speaking out the words of faith thereby ensuring the people's co-operation.

enraged and informs Moses "I will "strike" (*nakah*) them with pestilence and disown them, and I will make of you a nation far more numerous than they!" (Num 14:12). Moses passionately intercedes before the LORD on their behalf who spares not only their lives, but by extension all those of the future generations as well.

In summary, the keyword "strike" (*nakah*) in the Moses narrative is associated with punishment and death from his first words. It ties his crime of murder and flight from the land in which he lives to the death and destruction of the plagues, to offenses punishable by death in the law, and ultimately to the act that will prevent Moses from entering the land for which he longs. However, it is the obedient striking Moses preformed during the plagues that will result in the birth of the nation of Israel. What is more, as a result of Moses' failures, God brings life in the provision of life-giving water and by sparing the life of the nation of Israel.

Alter observes that "the implicit theology of the Hebrew Bible dictates a complex moral and psychological realism in biblical narrative because God's purposes are always entrammeled in history, dependent on the acts of individual men and women for their continuing realization."[40] *As such, God's character and purposes are learned through the medium of the biblical character.* God's judgment on Moses may seem excessive. Yet behind the judgment lies the important fact that God demands obedience in order to live in his chosen land as his chosen people. Even the most revered leader is not exempt from this requirement. Left to their own devices, the destiny of humans —even the most righteous and powerful — is death. However, obedience to YHWH and the ongoing life associated with him suggests a theology of life after death embedded within the "strike" episodes in the life of Moses. Obedience to God is a requirement for citizenship and life

[40] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*,12.

in the land and for life after death.[41] As the beloved prophet and friend of God he would see the land, something no one else (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) in his generation experiences. Moses will eventually undergo an honored and unique departure full of hints of ongoing life and blessing.

4.2.2 The Call of Moses

Pharoah seeks to kill Moses when he learns that Moses has killed an Egyptian (Exod 2:15). He flees to Midian and sits down by a well. Moses escapes death once again and as Stuart notes: "For Moses, 'a certain well' will be the beginning of a new life."[42] It is here that he encounters Zipporah, who would become his wife, her sisters, and ultimately her father, a Midianite priest (2:16-22). Moses lives in Midian, working as a shepherd for "a long time," and meanwhile "the Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from bondage rose up to God" (2:23-24). The time has come for God to remember his people and execute his plan for their rescue. Moses encounters God for the first time in the story of the burning bush. God identifies himself in two ways: the God of their Fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob (3:6), and as *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*[43] (3:14). Sarna observes that title [God of your father] expresses special intimacy between God and his follower, and it is significant to note that this formula is never used in reference to Abraham:

> It is only by and to Isaac and Jacob that we find it. In other words, the narrative implicitly recognizes that the advent of Abraham constitutes a break with the past, religiously speaking. By the same token, the disappearance of …"God of the father" following the Exodus constitutes tacit but irrefutable evidence that a new

[41] Ps. 40:6-8. William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews,* NDBS (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 136-37 notes "Always there had been voices crying out for God that the only sacrifice was the sacrifice of obedience" (1 Sam 15:22; Ps 40:6-8; 50:14; 51:16-7, Hos 6:6; Isa 1:11-17; Mic 6:6-8).

[42] Stuart, *Exodus*, 99.

[43] The various English translation of *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh* include, "I Am That I Am;" "I Am Who I Am;" "I Will Be What I Will Be."

> stage in the history of Israelite religion commences with the commissioning of Moses.[44]

In addition, names in the HB expressed something about the character of the one named. As such, God reveals his name "so that men and women may know him and have a relationship with him."[45] These two names of God, used in the call of Moses, speak to a theology of death to life embedded within the story, for they highlight God's character as the living God of life.

4.2.2.1 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

We have noted that Jesus cited the story of the call of Moses from the burning bush as a prooftext for a theology of life after death in the HB. His confrontation with the Sadducees concerning the resurrection of the dead and eternal life is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels:

> But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob]?" He is not the God of the dead but of the living. (Matt 22:31-32 NIV)

> Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken! (Mark 12:26-27 NIV).

> But even Moses revealed that the dead are raised in the passage about the bush where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live before him (Luke 20:37-38 NIV)

[44] Sarna, *Exploring Exodus,* 44. This same God appeared to Moses' ancestors, including Abraham. The name is not used in connection to Abraham because he is the first of the ancestors/fathers of Israel.

[45] Routledge, *OT Theology,* 82 notes that "in pagan religions, knowing a god's name gave access to his or her power and could be used in a magical way to manipulate the deity. God forbids his name to be abused in that way" (Exod 20:7).

Jesus based his interpretation of this text on the name of God as revealed to Moses in Exod 3:6, "I am," he said, "the God of your father,[46] the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Sarna observes:

> In the present instance, the epithet identifies the God who is addressing Moses with the One who made promises of peoplehood and national territory to each of the Patriarchs. It gives voice to the unbroken continuity of the generations and puts the present plight of the Israelites and the imminent call to Moses into historical and theological perspective.[47]

The promises of progeny and land apply to them as well as to future generations, because those ancestors are living. However, Hamilton suggests that Jesus, by citing this verse, is alluding to the hypothetical scenario of sterility proposed by the Sadducees that in turn echoes the infertility of the wives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He argues:

> We can agree that, without a knowledge of Jesus' citing this passage in the context he does, it is unlikely that anybody would read into the Exodus verse a resurrection emphasis in its original context…If Abraham knew that his body was "as good as dead" [Heb 11:12] so also the Israelites in Egypt know they are "as good as dead" with no possibility of a future generation. But the God who "remembered" Rachel (Gen 30:22) is the God who, upon hearing the groans of his own in Egypt, "remembered" his covenant with the ancestors (Exod 2:24). That seems to be the point that Jesus is making in the Synoptics, even if he moves the issue to postmortem existence. That is to say, God has an excellent track record when it comes to sabotaging death, any kind of death.[48]

However, the text is clear that the intent of the Sadducees was to disprove resurrection and Jesus' response focuses on the God of the living, not sterility. The Sadducees were well aware of, and may have interpreted the Exodus text in precisely the way that Hamilton suggests Jesus is

[46] Sarna, *Exodus,* 15 notes that "this epithet, frequently used in the Book of Genesis, all but vanishes in Israel during the period of the Exodus, to be replaced by 'God of the fathers,' the plural, referring to the three Patriarchs."

[47] Ibid., 15.

[48] Hamilton, *Exodus,* 51.

doing, for they considered the Law of Moses as authoritative.[49] They knew God could sabotage death, but did not believe that Scripture taught that he provided ongoing life after death.[50] It was Jesus' teaching concerning the resurrection they were seeking to refute, not God's ability to provide children and rescue them. Furthermore, as we argued in the presentation of our methodology, Jesus expects Nicodemus to be aware of life after death as Israel's learned teacher, and in the parable of Lazarus, the rich man was forbidden to warn his family of their impending doom as they had Moses and the prophets to inform them.

A theological interpretation of God's identification of himself to Moses in relation to his ancestors, suggests a theology of ongoing life after death embedded within this narrative that contributes to that theology in the stories of his forebearers. It is a theology that will be increasingly and more overtly revealed by God in Scripture.[51] Moses' "initial encounter with God is a terrifying experience."[52] Yet Moses can rest assured that he will share the fate of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the living followers of the living God. God is in effect, telling Moses that his deceased fathers are presently alive and in his presence.

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[49] Andrew A. Das, "Sadducees" in *LBD*, ed. by John D. Barry *et al.* (Bellingham: Lexham Press) 2016. Logos.

[50] Gary G. Porton, "Sadducees." In *AYBD* 5, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 892 writes "Josephus refers to the Sadducees' rejection of the concept of fate and their acceptance of the idea of man's free will. He implies that they held these ideas so that God could not be held responsible for evil. Furthermore, the Sadducees did not believe that the soul continued to exist after death or that people suffered punishments or received rewards after they died."

[51] Jason S. Sturdevant, "Accommodation," in *LBD,* eds. John D. Barry *et al*. (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos, states, "God desires to reveal the truths necessary for the well-being and salvation of humanity. To communicate, then, God must adapt such truths for the capabilities of the human mind … For example, God allows descriptions of His hands or eyes, but only because people have difficulty imagining God in non-anthropomorphic ways. As humanity—or an individual—makes progress, God can offer deeper and more complex truths in His self-revelation. Such progressive revelation, as understood by early Christian authors, culminated in the incarnation of Christ." We have argued that the inspired biblical writers of the historical books presented the revelation of God in story. As such, theology is embedded therein, and was intelligible to the readers.

[52] Sarna, *Exodus,* 15. "And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (Exod 3:6).

4.2.2.2 *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*: *"I Am That I Am;" "I Am Who I Am;" "I Will Be Who I Will Be"*

El Shaddai was the name of God usually associated with the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel (Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11). We have argued that although the etymology of the name is debated, it is most often used in the context of fertility. As such, God is associated with the provision of progeny and ongoing life that culminated in the prolific fertility of the Israelites in Egypt. There have been many attempts to explain the use of the name YHWH in the patriarchal narratives. Stuart argues that YHWH was a name known to Noah (Gen 9:26), Abraham (12:8), Isaac (Gen 26:25), Jacob (28:16) and Laban (30:27), although not used predominately by Jacob's offspring. He suggests that "it appears that Moses…intended that we realize that the generation after Jacob, and all subsequent generations up to his own had lost…knowledge of the true God and…the practice of praying to him and worshipping him properly…by his name."[53] Routledge contends that the narrator's purpose for inserting YHWH into the earlier narratives was purposeful in order to "emphasize the continuity between patriarchal worship and the later worship of YHWH."[54] Both of these arguments are valid. As Meyer notes, "YHWH's role in this unfolding story was anticipated…in the story of God's prior interaction with the ancestors. Thus, YHWH becomes inextricably part of the story of that one God's relationship with one people, Israel."[55]

At any rate, in Exod 6:2-6, God identifies *El Shaddai* and YHWH as one and the same:[56]

> God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name YHWH. I also established My covenant with them, to give, them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: 'I am the LORD. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage.

[53] Stuart, *Exodus,* 120.
[54] Routledge, *OT Theology*, 94.
[55] Carol Meyers, *Exodus,* NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 59.
[56] Lisa W. Davison, "El Shaddai" in *EBD,* ed. D. N. Freedman *et al.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 403.

> I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements.'"[57]

God initially identifies himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (3:6) and informs Moses that he has "marked well the plight of my people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry [and] because of their taskmasters…I have come down to rescue them" Much to the dismay of Moses, it is he who has been chosen by God to accomplish this task (3:7-10).[58] Moses asks God, "Who am I that I should go…" (3:11)?[59] God responds with the promise of his empowering presence and the provision of a sign that will bear witness to that promise (12).[60] Moses questions God concerning his name which he reveals. Sarna notes that "name-giving in the ancient world implied the wielding of power over the one named; hence, the divine name can only proceed from God Himself."[61]

> Moses said to God, "When I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "*Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*." He continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, *Ehyeh* sent me to you!" [15] And God said further to Moses, "Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: This shall be my name forever, This my appellation for all eternity.'" (Exod 3:13-15)

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[57] Sarna, *Exodus,* 18 aptly argues that YHWH could not have been an entirely new name to the Israelites, for it would have held no meaning for the oppressed Hebrews in Egypt and as such would not be tied to the covenantal promises. "The name YHWH only came into prominence as the characteristic personal name of the God of Israel in the time of Moses…Without doubt, the revelation of the divine name YHWH to Moses registers a new stage in the history of Israelite monotheism."

[58] Hamilton, *Exodus,* 58 observes: "Presumably the Lord has the resources and ability to act independently, to deliver Israel by himself, without Moses' assistance. Seldom in Scripture, however, does God act so unilaterally. The scriptural pattern seems to be God's using people to reach people."

[59] Ibid., 58. Hamilton notes that an objection or demurring is part of a common pattern of a call narrative. See the call of Gideon (Judg 6:14-7), Saul (1 Sam 9-10), and Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-10).

[60] The sign that God was with Moses, and therefore his mission was authorized by God, was "when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain" (Exod 3:12).

[61] Sarna, *Exodus,* 18.

YHWH, and all the meaning that is revealed in that name, will be God's name forever.[62] Meyer observes: "All told, as the culmination of the passage in which God's name is revealed indicates, YHWH's name and nature exists in time in all directions, 'forever… for all generations'" (3:15).[63]

Contrary to many alternative suggestions,[64] "it is widely accepted that YHWH is a causative formation of the Hebrew verb "to be" (הוה, *hwh*)." [65] Sarna remarks,

> *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*… has variously been translated, "I Am That I Am," "I Am Who I Am," and "I Will Be What I Will Be." It clearly evokes YHWH, the specific proper name of Israel's God, known in English as the Tetragrammaton, that is, "the four consonants." The phrase also indicates that the earliest recorded understanding of the divine name was as a verb derived from the stem *h-v-h*, taken as an earlier form of *h-y-h*, "to be". Either it expresses the quality of absolute Being, the eternal, unchanging, dynamic presence, or it means, "He causes to be." YHWH is the third person masculine singular; *ehyeh* is the corresponding first person singular.[66]

In the ANE, a name "is intended to connote character and nature…therefore the Tetragrammaton expresses the quality of Being…in the sense of the reality of God's active, dynamic presence"[67] (i.e., he is 'living'). His unique name, "I Am," connotes life without beginning or end, as well as the power to create and sustain life,[68] unbounded by time or place.

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[62] Sarna, *Exodus*, 18 states "God's unvarying dependability provides assurance that His promises will be fulfilled."

[63] Meyers, *Exodus,* 59.

[64] J. L. McLaughlin, "Yahweh" in *EBD,* eds. D. N. Freedman *et al.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1402 comments, "Despite appeals to the Arabic root *hwy*, meaning 'to fall,' 'to blow,' or 'to love/be passionate,' the scholarly consensus still favors derivation from the Hebrew root *hwh* (later *hyh*), 'to be.' Thus, *Yahwēh* alludes to the deity's creative activity."

[65] M. A. Shields and R. K. Hawkins, "YHWH" in *LBD,* ed. J. D. Barry *et al.* (Bellingham: Lexham Press. 2016), Logos.

[66] Sarna, *Exodus,* 17-18.

[67] Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 52.

[68] Brown, Driver, and Briggs*, EBDBHEL*, 218: "Many recent scholars explain יַהֲוֶה as Hiph. of הוה (= היה) *the one bringing into being, life-giver* (cf. הַוָּה Gn 3:20) Schr HSch; *giver of existence, creator*, Kue Tiele; *he who brings to pass* (so already Le Clerc), *performer of his promises*."

His name speaks to a theology of life after death, for ongoing life is only "possible through the miraculous power of the living God."[69]

The two names of God mentioned in the call of Moses are ultimately and inextricably bound together in God's third declaration of his name in the call of Moses: "And God said further to Moses, 'Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: YHWH [third person], the *God of your fathers,* the God of *Abraham,* the God of *Isaac* and the God of *Jacob*, has sent me to you'" (3:15). The God of the Fathers and YHWH are the same God.[70] Fretheim identifies several dimensions of divine name-giving. It is distinctive; setting God apart from others. It entails relationship, for "naming the name is necessary for closeness. Anyone whose name is known becomes part of a community that has names; God thereby choses to join the historical community…To give the name YHWH with reference to God of the fathers ties this God to a certain history."[71] Included in that history is a theology of life after death embedded within the stories of their ancestors.

Both of the names for God in the call of Moses inform God's further revelation of himself as well as a theology of ongoing life after death: *El Shaddai* and the metaphorical picture of eternal life imagined by progeny, and *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh,* a name that in essence means life.[72]

4.3 A Theology of Death to Life in the Death of Moses

The death of Moses is first alluded to in Num 20:12. Here Moses learns that he will not lead the congregation into the land. In Num 27:12 God tells Moses that he will die after he has ascended "the heights of Abarim and view[ed] the land that I have given to the Israelite people." However,

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[69] Levenson, *Resurrection,* 132.

[70] As noted above, God, in Exod 6:3, identifies the "God of the fathers" as *El Shaddai.*

[71] Terence Fretheim, "Yahweh," in *NIDOTTE* 4, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1297.

[72] Our thanks to Dr. H. Douglas Buckwalter for his input and insight concerning a theology of death to life in the name of YHWH. "Perhaps because the name YHWH itself means 'living' — his activity in Israel constantly shows as much, e.g., the plagues and the Exodus. Hence, the OT reflects that in its content. The Holy Spirit would have it no other way, in being at work in the composition of the OT books." See also, Johnson, *Shades of Sheol*, 46.

unlike the death of Aaron which occurs shortly after it is foretold, Moses does not die until Deut 34:5. Furthermore, his death is referred to some seven times before it actually takes place in Deuteronomy (1:37; 3:23-29; 31:2, 14, 16, 27-29; 32:48-52).[73] Why is Moses' impending death mentioned so frequently? What is the intent of the repetition?

Alter observes that repetitions in Scripture are assumed to be a reflection of the use of source materials. He notes that "scholars…on the evidence of style, consistency of narrative data, theological outlook, and historical assumptions, have been exhaustively analyzed as a splicing of three separate primary strands — the Yahwistic Document (J), the Elohistic Document (E), and the Priestly Document (P)."[74] Consequently, many scholars argue that repetitions in the text are thought to represent the view of the various documents.

Some Jewish writings have interpreted repetitions to mean that Moses did not want to die; that he was "not so eager to accept the divine decree."[75] As such different scenarios reflect the process by which Moses comes to accept his death. Targum and Midrashic writings attest to this view:

> And so, when the Lord said to him, "Go up into this mountain of Abarim, Mt. Nebo…" Moses thought to himself "Perhaps this ascent will be similar to the ascent of Mt. Sinai." Therefore, he said, "Let me go and sanctify the people." The Lord said to him: "Not at all! Go up and behold the land which I am giving to Israel as a possession, and die on the mountain which you ascend and be gathered to your ancestors – just as your brother Aaron died on Mt. Hor and was gathered to his fathers." Whereupon Moses opened his mouth in prayer and said: "Master of the world, if you please, let me not be like the person who had an only son that was taken prisoner, and he went and redeemed him at great cost and taught him wisdom and skill and acquired a wife for him and set up a kingly gazebo for him [and so on] and just when the time came for him to celebrate with his son and daughter-in-law [at their wedding]…the person in question was suddenly summoned by the

[73] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy,* NIBC, eds., Robert L. Hubbard Jr. and Robert K. Johnston (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 312

[74] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* 164 notes "A century of analytic scholarship has made powerful arguments to the effect that where we might naively imagine that we are reading a text, what we actually have is a constant stitching together of earlier texts drawn from divergent literary and sometimes oral traditions, with minor or major interventions by later editors in the form of glosses, connecting passages, conflations of sources, and so forth."

[75] James L. Kugel, *The Bible as It Was* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1997), 537.

> king to the law court and was sentenced to death, and they did not even allow him to enjoy his son's celebration. So similarly, have I labored for this people… and now that the time has come for me to cross the Jordan and inherit the land, I am sentenced to die! Please, allow me to cross the Jordan and enjoy Israel's celebration, and after that I will die." (*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Deut 32:49-50)

Moses seeks one last time to be allowed to enter the land. He would honor God's repeated attempts to get him to die if he could just cross the Jordan and celebrate. However, there is not a hint of such a conversation in the text (32:49-50). What is more, Moses beseeches God to let him cross over in an earlier passage, a request God responded to in no uncertain terms: "Enough! Never speak to Me of this matter again!" (Deut 3:23-26). After such an admonition it is doubtful that Moses would have attempted to ask, yet again, to enter the land.

Another writing pictures Moses as fearfully anxious upon learning that he has but one hour to live.

> A heavenly voice went forth and said to him [Moses], You only have an hour left to live in this world. He said to Him: O Master of the world! Let me [instead] go about like a bird, flying all over the world, gathering food on the earth and drinking water from streams and at night going back to his nest. God said to him "Enough!" He said to him: "Master of the world! [But You are called] The rock whose deeds are perfect [for all His ways are just]" [Deut.32:4]! And he began to weep, and he wept and said: To whom shall I go who can seek mercy on my behalf. (*Petirat Moshe* (Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrasch* 1.125)

However, again, any such scenario is absent from the text. Rather, the text records Moses carefully preparing the people and his successor to carry on without him (Deut 31: 23-26).

The theme of Moses' reluctance to die also found its way into Jewish songs and prayers:

> Said the Lord from the midst of his Shekhinah [the divine Presence]:
> "For what reason are you [Moses] afraid of death?
> I have decreed it upon all creatures."
> Moses grew faint when he heard this thing,

> And at once he went to the great [city of] Hebron.[76]
> He cried out and summoned Adam from his grave.
> "Tell me why you sinned in the Garden,
> [Why] you tasted and ate from the tree of Knowledge.
> You have given your sons over to weeping and wailing!
> The whole garden was before you, yet you were not satisfied.
> Oh why did you rebel against the Lord's commandment?"
> (*Targumic Tosefta*: *Alphabetical Acrostic on the Death of Moses,* Oxford-Bodleian 2701/9, 64b)

The text does not support the theories that the repetitions of Moses' upcoming death are the result of his refusal to die much less a fear of death. Moses' request to live sprang from his desire to enter the land *before* he faced bodily death. Most certainly he longed to be buried in and thus attached to the land as his forefathers had been. We propose that these repetitions alluding to the death of Moses are an intentional literary device.[77]

Repetitions in Scripture always mean something. They are a powerful literary technique used to convey the meaning of a text. Alter observes:

> The[se] large implications of repetition in biblical narrative…the complexity and variety of this seemingly mechanical device have to be grasped in detail. Writers in all times and places have made artistic occasions out of the formal limitations of their medium and of their inherited conventions, and this is demonstrably true of the biblical authors. If the requirements of oral delivery and a time-honored tradition of storytelling may have prescribed a mode of narration in which frequent verbatim repetition was expected, the authors of the biblical narratives astutely discovered how the slightest strategic variations in the pattern of repetitions could serve the purposes of commentary, analysis, foreshadowing, thematic assertion, with a wonderful combination of subtle understatement and dramatic force.[78]

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[76] It is interesting to note that the Jewish interpreters identified Adam as being buried at the same site as the patriarchs.

[77] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* 119-120. Alter proposes a five-part scale of repetitive structuring and focusing devices in biblical narrative which includes *leitwort*, motif, theme, sequence of action and type scene. He defines sequence of action as a "pattern [that] appears most commonly and most clearly in the folktale form of three consecutive repetitions, or three plus one, with some intensification or increment from one occurrence to the next, usually concluding either in a climax or a reversal." The repetitions of the announcement of Moses' impending death climaxes in the narrative of his actual death.

[78] Ibid., 114-15.

As such, repetitions serve primarily to add meaning and structure to a text, rather than merely a reflection of different sources.[79] With each repetition comes "the original urgent message to contend with, a message which in the potency of its concrete verbal formulation does not allow itself to be forgotten or ignored."[80] The momentous occasion and circumstances surrounding the death of Moses are just such an event, worthy of highlighting through repetition. As the book of Numbers closes and Deuteronomy unfolds, along with repetitions of the pending death of Moses, the reader is lead to ask: When will Moses die and when will we process the land? There is an "ominous interplay between the promise of the land and the warning that Moses will never enter it."[81] Anticipation of Moses' death mounts as it becomes clear that Israel will not enter the land as long as Moses lives. Hence it would seem that repetitive statements concerning the death of Moses are an effective literary technique used to heighten the tension and drive the story to its dramatic conclusion at the crossing of the Jordan.[82] Repetitions of impending death ultimately point to a theology of life after death, for Moses must die in order for the land of Israel to be born. In addition, they echo the overarching theme instituted in Gen 3:21–4:2 where death must occur (in this case an animal) to make garments for Adam and Eve, also as a result of their disobedience. They too, are barred from the land and immediately Cain is born. Sin results in death, yet life continues on, in progeny, symbolizing a theology of life after death.

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[79] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 170. Alter supposes that "duplication together with seeming contradiction" is actually the work of skillful writer/redactors, who very much knew what they were doing even if we do not! For more on the composition of the text as a purposeful technique see 163-92. Dorsey, *OT Structure,* 37-39 illustrates that "biblical authors employed structured repetition to convey meaning."

[80] Ibid., 112.

[81] Wenham, *Numbers*, 217.

[82] Ashley, *Numbers,* 549-550. Ashley argues that the death of Moses was originally located at the end of Numbers. Structurally it makes sense as the first half of Numbers ends with a story concerning Zelophehad's daughters followed by the announcement of Moses' death. The second half would form a parallel structure with another story about the daughters and Moses actual death. When the book of Deuteronomy was attached to Numbers the narrative of Moses death was added to the end of Deuteronomy. However, Dorsey, *OT Structure*, 86-87 illustrates convincingly that the stories of the daughters of Zelophehad fit nicely into the overall structure of the victory in the plains of Moab (Num 21:21–Deut 3:29).

We will now look carefully at three references to Moses' death in the book of Deuteronomy (4:21-22; 31:14-16; 32:48-50). A close look at these passages reveals that within the repetitions of this momentous event is embedded a theology of ongoing life. The initial reference is found in Deut 4:21-22:

> Now the LORD was angry with me on your account and swore that I should not cross the Jordan and enter the good land that the LORD your God is assigning you as a heritage. For I must die in this land; I shall not cross the Jordan. But you will cross and take possession of that good land.

Although God does not tell Moses at this time that he is going to die it is heavily implied. Each repetition drives the story by providing more information and anticipation surrounding the event of the death of Moses. In Num 27:12-13 God informs Moses that after he views the land from a mountain he would be "gathered to your kin, just as your brother Aaron was." Moses pleads with God one last time to be allowed to "cross over and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan, that good hill country, and the Lebanon." Moses' repeated use of the word "good" (*ṭôḇ'*) certainly seems intentional as it links the Promised Land with Creation which God called "good."[83] Behind this is the knowledge that back in that "good" land stands the Tree of Life which has become inaccessible. Once again God will place his created people in a good land with the promise and intention of life. Brueggemann notes that this land is the "new creation of Gen. 1:31, where the fullness of all YHWH's abundance comes to fruition."[84]

The second notice of the impending death of Moses is found in Deut 31:14-16:

> The LORD said to Moses: The time is drawing near for you to die. Call Joshua and present Yourselves in the Tent of Meeting, that I may instruct him. Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves in the Tent of Meeting. The LORD appeared in the Tent, in a pillar of cloud, the pillar of cloud having come to rest at the entrance

[83] Moses uses the word "good" (*ṭôḇ'*) to describe the land eleven times in Deuteronomy.
[84] Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy,* 47.

of the tent. The LORD said to Moses: You are soon to be with your fathers. This people will thereupon go astray…"

Here the importance of the change in leadership that will occur with possession of the land is highlighted. It has become clear that all of those, including the leaders, of the rebellious generation will not enter the land. God's land must have good, faithful leadership. God graciously grants Moses the opportunity to view the land, but only from afar. "Look at it well," said God, "for you shall not go across yonder Jordan. Give Joshua his instructions, and imbue him with strength and courage, for he shall go across at the head of this people, and he shall allot to them the land that you may only see" (3:28). The faithfulness of the new generation has been contrasted with the unfaithfulness of the old (1:32, 26-33, 41-45). God instructs Moses to write a poem as a witness against the people when they turn from YHWH in the future. Moses knows that they will eventually succumb to wickedness and rebellion that would end in misfortune.[85] He reads the poem to the entire congregation together with Joshua (32:1-43). A detailed discussion of the poem is beyond the scope of this paper, nevertheless one passage is worth including:

See, then, that I, I am He;
There is no god beside Me.
I deal death and give life;
I wounded and I will heal:
None can deliver from My hand. (32:39)

God's sovereignty is established in the first line. As such he has power over everything including life and death. What is most striking about the third line is the word order. One would expect the verse to read that God first gives life and then deals death. However, life comes after

[85] Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy,* 277. Whether this poem is viewed as prolepsis or "an independent poem that has been placed here among the materials that mark the transition from the covenant commands of Deuteronomy to the covenant history beginning in Josh 1" its main focus is that the life-giving Rock is always faithful even when his people are not. The word "Rock" is used 7 times in this poem, a number that certainly brings the completed Creation to mind.

death. The words of God that Moses speaks or writes are done so "with the specific intention of imparting life."[86] The LORD will indeed vindicate his people (32:36) who will pass from death to life. Embedded in this poem is a belief in the afterlife for the faithful. In fact, Moses offers other indications of a belief in the afterlife. Deuteronomy 4:1; 5:30; 8:1; and 30:15-16 all promise that obedience to Torah will result in life. With this comes the implication that one has the ability to choose disobedience and consequently death.

> I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life — if you and your offspring would live — by loving the LORD your God, heeding His commands, and holding fast to Him. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that the LORD your God swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them. (Deut 30:19-20)

There is the sense that choosing life in these passages is equated with continued existence in the land for the nation. They apply to the individual as well. Kugel notes, "choosing the good would (quite apart from Israel's continued life in its homeland) allow a person to enjoy the rewards that God normally grants to the righteous in their own individual lives."[87] Moses is laying out a choice between two ways of living; one that leads to death, the other to life. Everyone is on the path to death, for we are all destined to die. Yet Moses says "choose life…that you might live" (30:18), rather than disobedience that brings death. If this is meant only for life in the land; "Why tell people who are already living to do something so that they might live?"[88] We propose that Moses' words carry a double meaning and refer to life in the land as well as metaphorically for life after death. And like us, the ancient Israelites had to choose it. Faithful observance of God's

[86] Craigie, *Deuteronomy,* 390. This will also be a hopeful verse for those living in exile. The exile was a kind of "death" and the return to the land a new "life."

[87] Kugel, *Bible as It Was,* 528.

[88] Ibid., 531.

word "is not a trifling thing for you: it is your very life; through it you shall long endure on the land that you are to possess upon crossing the Jordan" (32:47) and beyond! Moses' teachings contained words of life that indicate his belief in an afterlife in the presence of God. There is life and there is death, both here and in the hereafter.

The final passage to describe Moses' impending death is found immediately after the reading of the poem:

> That very day the LORD spoke to Moses: Ascend these heights of Abarim to Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab facing Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving the Israelites as their holding. You shall die on the mountain that you are about to ascend, and shall be *gathered* to your kin, as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was *gathered* to his kin. (Deut 32:48-50)

God instructs Moses to climb Mount Nebo and there to view the land he is forbidden to enter. Then Moses will die and be "gathered" (*'āsaf*) to his kin. We have seen this Hebrew keyword in the deaths of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[89] Here God uses it to describe the deaths of Moses and Aaron. Scholars have argued that to be "gathered" to one's kin refers to the practice of secondary burial where the bones of a deceased individual are gathered up and moved in order to make room for subsequent burials.[90] However careful reading of the text reveals that this term in the death language of a biblical character is rare and reserved for an illustrious group of characters. Namely, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Josiah are all gathered to their fathers *before* their burials. As such, this language cannot refer to the common practice of secondary burial.

After Moses' death the Israelites obediently served the Lord throughout the days of Joshua and the elders who outlived him. In fact, this was perhaps the most faithful generation in all of

[89] Rachel used it when naming Joseph, saying, "the LORD has taken away (*'āsaf*) my disgrace" (Gen 30:23).
[90] King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel,* 365.

Israel's history. They lived in the land with no king or prophet, remembering all that God had done for them:

> The people served the LORD during the lifetime of Joshua and the lifetime of the older people who lived on after Joshua and who had witnessed all the marvelous deeds that the LORD had wrought for Israel. Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten years, and was buried on his own property, at Timnath-heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. And all that generation were likewise gathered (*'āsaf*) to their fathers. (Judg 2:7-10)

God tells the righteous King Josiah: "Assuredly, I will gather (*'āsaf*) you to your fathers and you will be laid in your tomb in peace" (2 Kgs 22:20, 2 Chr 34:28).[91] It is significant that the language "gather to one's people/fathers" (*'āsaf*)[92] is used in the deaths of these foundational biblical characters. It infuses their deaths with a theology of life and relationship after death. They are gathered together after death, and prior to burial to those who have died before them, not in a tomb containing the ancestral bones,[93] but as living people in community, in the presence of the living God. It paints a beautiful word picture of a fruitful harvest[94] gathered by YHWH. By using *'āsaf* exclusively in the deaths of these people, a common sense of identity with faithfulness,

[91] Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy,* 289 observes that the language used in describing the end of the lives of Moses and King Josiah are strikingly similar. "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him" (2 Kgs 23:25). He argues that this "Deuteronomic plant in the narrative, [is] a device whereby this theological history places a Moses-like figure at the end of the royal history in order to bracket and frame the entire account by the claims of Moses. Josiah is Moses who reappears in royal garb at the end of the story." Josiah's revival of the Law and proper worship practices certainly mirror Deuteronomy as well. It is also interesting that he is slain by the Egyptian Pharaoh Neco while foolhardily attempting to stop him from marching against Assyria; heedless of God's word that he was not to fight Neco, he dies. Moses, however, defeated Pharaoh through obedience to God, and the people live.

[92] The Niphal stem is used, invoking a passive meaning. As such, it is God who is performing the gathering.

[93] We have argued in ch. 2 that the importance of bones in Hebrew burial practices symbolizes, metaphorically, ongoing life after death. The gathering of a person prior to burial is then reimagined in the secondary burial of the bones.

[94] When used in the Qal stem *'āsaf* refers to a harvest or gathering of produce. "Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield" (Exod 23:10).

righteousness and obedience is implied, as well as a living community of God, who share that identity, and as such, enjoy relationship in the afterlife.

There are several hints of a theology of death to life embedded in the actual death narrative of Moses.

> Moses went up from the steppes of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the summit of Pisgah, opposite Jericho, and the LORD showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan; all Naphtali; the land of Ephraim and Manasseh; the whole land of Judah as far as the Western Sea; the Negeb; and the Plain – the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees – as far as Zoar. And the LORD said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, 'I will assign it to your offspring.' I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross there." (Deut 34:1-4)

It is only fitting that Moses should die on a mountaintop, for it was on a mountain that he first encountered YHWH (Exod 3:2) and received the Law (Exod. 19:20). There from Mount Nebo, the summit of the ridge opposite Jericho, God "showed" (*ra'ah*)[95] Moses a panoramic view of the land.[96] Beginning in the north at Gilead and Dan, his gaze travels westward and then south, ending at the Dead Sea and the plain north of it. Of course, Moses' vision of the land is not possible from where he stood. Even on a clear day, mountains would partially obstruct his view.[97] Perhaps the tradition associated with *The Assumption of Moses* arose from the belief that this glimpse of the land could only be achieved from the air.[98] A better understanding of Moses' vision may be found in the use of Hebrew root word "showed" (*ra'ah*). This Hebrew verb meaning to see with the eyes can also have derived meanings, all of which "require the individual to see physically

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[95] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *EBDBHEL*, 908; the Hiphil stem is used here, expressing causative action.

[96] Craigie, *Deuteronomy,* 404. The context of the word *pisgah* as used here means "ridge or serrated ridge."

[97] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy,* JPSTC (Philadelphia: JPS, 2003), 366. Some parts of this panorama cannot be seen by the human eye from Mount Nebo. Dan, the Mediterranean, and Zoar are blocked by intervening mountains. Since v. 1 reads, "the LORD showed him" perhaps the text means that God enabled Moses to see what would otherwise have been impossible.

[98] Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, WBC 6B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 871. Christensen notes that *The Assumption of Moses* contains an account of Moses being taken directly to heaven as opposed to dying a natural death. However, the text is quite clear that Moses did indeed die.

outside of himself or herself; to experience; to connote a spiritual observation and comprehension by means of seeing visions."[99] It is used seven times in the Creation story in Gen 1, when God looked upon what he had created and saw (*ra'ah*) that it was good.[100] It is the same verb used by God when he showed the land to Abraham. "And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had departed from him, 'Raise your eyes and look (*ra'ah*) out from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west, for I give all the land that you see (*ra'ah*) to you and your offspring forever'" (Gen 13:14-15). Furthermore, God refers back to this promise of land and offspring to Abraham in the verse following Moses' vision of the land, thereby reminding Moses that he is fulfilling the promise he made to the patriarchs. Not only does this highlight God's faithfulness, it implies that the deceased are aware of the fulfillment of the covenant God initiated with them. The keyword *ra'ah* links the visions of Abraham and Moses of the land to God's view of his Creation. God saw the land he created, where death did not exist, and called it good. Both Abraham and Moses experienced supernatural visions of the land. Could it be that they saw beyond the land of the promise to the land of God's eternal presence?[101] These supernatural visions serve as a metaphor for the land of the living that God will enable his righteous people to "cross-over" into after death. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and of Moses. He is the faithful God of the living.

> So Moses the servant of the LORD died there, in the land of Moab, at the command of the LORD. He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, near Beth-peor; and no one knows his burial place to this day. Moses was a hundred and twenty when he died; his eyes were undimmed and his vigor unabated. (Deut 34:5-7)

[99] Baker and Carpenter, *CWSDOT,* 1023.
[100] Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.
[101] The author of Hebrews realized a theology of life after death in the visions of the faithful (Heb 11:13-16).

Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. Scholars differ as to the significance of Moses' age at death.[102] The ideal lifespan in Egypt was one hundred and ten years, although the actual life-expectancy was much shorter.[103] Hence the lifespan of the one who speaks the life-giving words of the living God is superior to that of Pharaoh, ruler of a people fixated on death. The designation of Moses' age could have been based on some type of ANE or Israelite mathematical system.[104] Numbers often have symbolic applications in Scripture. One hundred twenty is a multiple of forty, a number which indicates a period of trial, the number of years in a generation, and as an indication of a completed cycle.[105] When viewed from this perspective Moses' life was one of three cycles of trials encompassing three generations.[106] Some would argue that Moses' statement in Deut 31:2: "I am now one hundred and twenty years old, I can no longer go out and come in" is a confession of encroaching weakness. He appears to be unable to perform his daily responsibilities.[107] Alter, however, observes that the idiom "to go out and come in (or bring out and bring in) means to lead forces in battle."[108] In the next verse Moses reiterates that Joshua is the one who would cross before them to "wipe out those nations from your path" (31:3). Thus, it is more likely that Moses is using these words to designate Joshua as his military successor because God has forbidden him to lead the military campaign into the land; not because he was

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[102] Christensen, *Deuteronomy,* 872 argues that 120 years is the life span designated by God for man after the fall, prior to the flood. "The LORD said, 'My breath shall not abide in man forever, since he too is flesh; let the days allowed, him be one hundred and twenty years'" (Gen 6:3). Speiser, *Genesis,* 46 and Waltke, *Genesis,* 117 maintain that 120 years in Gen 6:3 relates to the amount of time between that point and the flood during which God would tolerate the sinful behavior of mankind.

[103] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *IVPBBCOT,* 204.

[104] Christensen, *Deuteronomy,* 872. Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, 1058-59 also argues that 120 years is based on the Mesopotamian sexagesimal numerical system.

[105] J. J. Davis, "Numbers," in *EBD*, ed. D. N. Freedman *et al.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 974.

[106] Alter, *Five Books of Moses,* 1059. Alter notes that some commentators suggest that the life of Moses may be divided into 3 formulaic 40-year periods: 40 years each in Egypt, Midian and the wilderness. Stephen, the first Jewish Christian martyr certainly understood Moses' life as three periods of 40 years in Acts 7.

[107] Craigie, *Deuteronomy,* 369.

[108] Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, 1031. It is interesting to note that when the apostles chose a replacement for Judas in Acts 1:21 they said, "therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus *went in and out among us*."

physically incapable of it. Moreover, he had recently led the Israelites in victorious battle against the kings of Heshbon and Bashan (Deut 2:24-3:7) and climbed a high mountain alone. At any rate, when considering Moses' age, it is important to note that he was old — yet most certainly not infirm. There was still vibrant life in him.

Moses' eyes were undimmed at his death. Tigay notes that biblical as well as other ancient texts "commonly describe the eyesight and other faculties of the aged to indicate whether they have remained heathy or become feeble."[109] The ability to see clearly stands in stark contrast to the poor vision of Isaac. "When Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esau…" (Gen. 27:1). Here the aging patriarch was unable to see physically or spiritually which led to all sorts of dire consequences. On the other hand, Moses' last sight is of the land in a supernatural way as revealed by God. Moses sees clearly beyond death with eyes undimmed, focused on the promise of eternal life in the land.

Moses' vigor (*leah*) was unabated. This is the only instance of the noun *leah* in the HB. It indicates vigor or strength and refers to a drive or the spark of energy of life.[110] It is usually translated as strength or vigor and understood to mean that Moses was still strong. However, the audience already knows that. Moses has defeated enemies and climbed a mountain. He has clear vision both physically and spiritually. He is lucid in thought, word, and deed. Why add another statement about his strength? There are two uses in Ugaritic texts which indicate that the word means "sexual power." As such, it relates to a man's sexual force.[111] The use of *leah* with regard to sexual prowess may indicate that even at his death, Moses was capable of producing life.[112] As

[109] Tigay, *Deuteronomy,* 338.
[110] Baker and Carpenter, *CWSDOT*, 547.
[111] Christensen, *Deuteronomy,* 872; also Craigie, *Deuteronomy,* 405.
[112] Brown., Driver, and Briggs, *EBDBHEL,* 535. The definition of *leah* here is "moisture, freshness" (i.e., *force, vigor*); —sf. וְלֹא נָס לֵחֹה Deut 34:7 *and his freshness had not fled*. It is interesting to note that the MT translates the noun as "his sap" (noun, unmarked gender, sing. construct, with 3rd per. sing suffix) did not flee (עֵינָו וְלֹא־נָס לֹא). G. E. Weil and K. Elliger., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997), 353. Sap is

such, his unusual vigor or ability to procreate at that time symbolizes ongoing life after death. The prophet who speaks the life-giving words of God will live on, for even at the brink of death Moses could father progeny.

We see echoes of a belief in an "ongoing life" theology connected to Moses in the life of the prophets Elijah and Elisha in 2 Kings. Elisha was following Elijah on the day he was to be taken to heaven in the hopes of witnessing the event. Elijah "took his mantle and rolling it up, he struck the water; it divided to the right and left, so that the two of them crossed over on dry land" (2:8). Shortly afterward, Elijah is taken to heaven without dying, and Elisha who sees it happen receives Elijah's mantle and a double portion (becomes his heir) of his spirit. "Taking the mantle…he too struck the water, it parted to the right and to the left, and Elisha crossed over" (2:14). It is impossible to miss the identification with Moses in these texts. Elisha goes on to have a ministry that is primarily one of death to life. He heals water that was causing death so that it might bring forth life (2:19-22). He multiplies the widow's oil so that she and her children might live and not die of starvation (4:1-7). He raises the son of the Shunammite woman from death to life (4:32-37). He cures the poisoned stew of "death in the pot," so that the people could eat it and live (4:38-41). Finally, Elisha dies, but his power over death lives on:

> Elisha died and was buried.[113] Now bands of Moabites used to invade the land at the coming of every year. Once a man was being buried, when the people caught sight of such a band; so they threw the corpse into Elisha's grave and made off. When the [dead] man came in contact with Elisha's bones, he came to life and stood up. (2 Kgs 13:20-21)

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the life's blood of a tree, and as such, it would seem that the MT likens Moses' vitality to that sustaining life force. Sap speaks to a theology of ongoing life after death for Moses is full of lifegiving vigor at death.

[113] This is a very anti-climactic obituary for such an illustrious prophet. Perhaps this is because of the pervasive death to life motif in his story, that continues after his death. Death was not the end of life for Elisha. If his bones could produce life, would not he himself possess it?

By associating Moses with Elijah who does not die and Elisha and his death to life ministry, we see a strong belief in life after death connected to Moses that was ongoing at the time of the monarchy. The words of the living God, spoken through his prophets lead powerfully to ongoing life for those who speak them and live by them.

Embedded within the death narrative of Moses is language that speaks of death to life. His death was not due to illness or infirmity. Moses, the servant of God, died because YHWH commanded it (Deut 34:5). Despite his age, he had clear and supernatural sight that enable him to see the good land beyond. He was able to procreate and bring forth life which symbolizes ongoing life in him after death. So strong was the notion of the life sustaining power of the words of God, that the two great non-writing prophets of the monarchy, Elijah and Elisha, echo and continue the triumph of life over death embedded within the story of Moses.

4.4 A Posthumous Theology of Death to Life

God buries Moses in an undisclosed valley. This is of course, unprecedented in Scripture and therefore raises many questions. Is it significant that there is no visible corpse? Why did Moses have such an undertaker extraordinaire? Why is the burial site hidden? Perhaps the answers to these questions lie in a theology of death to life in the burial of Moses.

There is little if any thought that Moses ascended into heaven without dying until the Tannaitic period of Judaism (70 BCE-200 CE). This is probably due to the fact that the text states categorically that Moses died.[114] Hence the absence of the corpse of Moses is meaningful for some other reason. There is evidence for a belief in a return to life and interaction with the living in the HB (1 Sam 28:12-19; Job 42:17; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2, 13). The latter passages reflect an

[114] John Lierman, *New Testament Moses* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004),199-205. These later Jewish writings include Josephus, Philo, *The Assumption of Moses,* and others.

eschatological resurrection. The Samuel text is an instance of necromancy, a practice "abhorrent to the LORD" (Deut 18:12).[115] In the Samuel text, the witch conjures Samuel's ghost at her own house — not at his grave. There is no need for proximity to the corpse in order to consult the dead and as such it is unlikely that the absence of Moses' corpse is relevant for preventing divination or consultation of his ghost. Yet seen from a theological point of view, the absence of the corpse of Moses accomplishes two purposes. First, every patriarch, king and non-writing prophet whose death is recorded has a visible corpse except Moses. This unique situation echoes the taking of the faithful Enoch[116] who did not die and as such, left no corpse. The lack of a corpse speaks to a theology of ongoing life after death. The prophet who mediated the life-giving words of God will not see decay. He will not be revered in a place of death. Furthermore, the lack of a corpse allows for the people to connect Moses to the land even though he never sets foot in it, for he will enter within the body of Torah.

Second, the Hebrew in verse six is translated literally "and he buried him." Alter argues for "he was buried" based on the assumption that "God's acting as a gravedigger for Moses seems incongruous with the representation of the deity in these narratives."[117] However there are several arguments from the text which make the translation "and he buried him" more likely. The passage is very clear that God and Moses were alone on the mountain, just as they were during their previous mountaintop encounters (Exod 3; 19:3, 20; 34:1-3). Why would this poignant finale be any different? The text also states implicitly that the burial site remains unknown. It is difficult to believe that the grave of the greatest leader of the Israelites could be kept hidden by anyone who

[115]Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth,* 64. Perhaps the strict laws restricting consultation of the dead and black magic reflect the tendency of the people to engage in those practices which were typical of the Canaanite death cult praxis.

[116] Gen 5:22-24. Enoch is said to have "walked faithfully" twice in these verses and is revered as faithful in Heb 11:5.

[117] Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, 1058.

may have buried him and consequently known its whereabouts. Lastly, contrary to the statement that God burying Moses is incongruous with the picture of God painted in the narrative, we would argue that the opposite is true. A God who faithfully chose, delivered, protected, fed, and clothed his people simply because he loved them would never forsake his servant Moses to the dishonor associated with an improper burial. In fact, God acting as "gravedigger" is just one incident in a series of many of a God who acts on behalf of his people in supernatural and loving ways.

It is possible that God buried Moses in order to prevent the Israelites from making his grave a shrine.[118] People may have been tempted to make pilgrimage from the land back to his grave in Moab. The biblical writer may have feared that exiled Jews would identify with Moses and thus Torah outside of the land.[119] Since ownership and thereby citizenship of a land is often acquired through burial sites (as with Abraham), Moses' grave would associate him with Moab and not the land of Israel.

A theological interpretation of God's action may be found within the structure of the Pentateuch itself. The creation of the first human was a two-part process. Man was formed by God from the dust of the earth and his life-force was breathed into him by God (Gen 2:7). It is fitting that the last death in the Pentateuch — the great prophet "whom the LORD singled out face to face" (Deut 34:10) — is a reversal of that process. At God's command the life-force of Moses departs and then God himself returns his body to the dust of the earth. The death and burial of the

[118] Tigay, *Deuteronomy,* 338. Tigay notes: "Many commentators have conjectured that Moses' grave site was kept secret to prevent people from making it a shrine and even worshipping Moses' spirit. It is known that descendants often brought food offerings to graves in order to sustain their ancestor's spirits and that, although forbidden, mediums consulted the spirits of the dead. Perhaps there was concern that, because of Moses' stature and his intimacy with God, if his grave site were accessible, offerings to his spirit might turn into outright worship or that people might find consulting his spirit irresistible, just as Saul consulted the spirit of the prophet Samuel, despite the ban on necromancy. The statement that 'no one knows his burial place to this day' could be polemical, intended to undermine claims that a particular site is Moses' grave."

[119] T. C. Romer and M. Z. Brettler, "Deuteronomy 34 and the Case for a Persian Hexateuch," *JBL* 119, no. 3 (2000), 401-419.

servant of God forms an inclusio with the creation of man in reverse. In the interim, God creates the people that will bear his name and ultimately bless the nations. Both acts were performed by God's own hand. They inform the reader that the righteous follower of God will return to him for all eternity. Just as the body will return to dust, so too will the breath return to God.

The death narrative of Moses is full of comforting hints of an afterlife. God and his Word are the power of life for his people both now and forevermore.

4.5 Summary

A theology of life after death is evident in the story of Moses well before his birth. The opening chapter of Exodus records the epic fertility of the Israelites and the midwives who defied the great Pharoah by snatching the Hebrew baby boys from the jaws of certain death to life. Moses' birth itself echoes both the Creation and Flood events, both of which are infused metaphorically and literally with a theology of life after death. Moses is observed to be *tôḇ,* and he is placed in an ark (*têbâh*). Six women, the bearers of life, are instrumental in keeping Moses alive.

The first words of Moses contain the Hebrew word "strike" (*nakah*). This keyword will continue to play a role in the story of Moses as a theology of life after death is envisioned when disobedient striking leads to death, and obedient striking yields life.

A theology of ongoing life is evident in the names of God in the account of the burning bush. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, El Shaddai and YHWH are all names for the same God. As such the covenantal promises of progeny and land continue for the people of God. The unique name for God, YHWH (to be, to have life), that will be his name forever, speaks to a theology of life after death. The living God is the God of the living.

The death of Moses includes several allusions to a theology of life after death. His undimmed vision and vigor portray a man that is still full of life at the brink of death. His unique

burial, by God, provides the opportunity for there to be no observable corpse, and as such Moses will not see decay. His death is a metaphor for ongoing life and indicates a theology of life after death in the story of Moses that begins before he is born and continues posthumously. Through the story of Moses God revealed to the biblical people that he, the living God, intended for them to experience ongoing life after death in the same way as Moses.

Chapter 5
A THEOLOGY OF DEATH TO LIFE IN THE STORY OF DAVID

5.0 Introduction

The story of King David begins in the final verses of Ruth,[1] a tale overflowing with a theology of ongoing life after death. Naomi's life made precarious by the deaths of her husband and sons, is restored through the birth of Obed, a child whose name would be "perpetuated in Israel," and "renew and sustain" her life (4:14-15). Tribble notes that "out of Naomi's pilgrimage comes a theology of providence. God gives life."[2] Obed would become the grandfather of King David, and like Moses, David's story is embedded with a theology of death to life prior to his birth.

Bergen observes that David is "given more narrative space than any other human being in the biblical account of Israel's history, and the account is sympathetically told."[3] Structurally, his story stands "squarely at the center of the Deuteronomistic history," thereby highlighting the

[1] P. Trible, "Book of Ruth" in *AYBD* 5, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 846. "In the Hebrew Bible Ruth appears among the Writings, though its precise location varies. According to the Babylonian Talmud (*B. Bat.* 14b), it comes first, to be followed by the Psalms. This order may be chronological. Set in the days of the judges, Ruth antedates the purported contexts of the other Writings. Ending with the genealogy of David, it prepares the way for the Psalms, most of which are attributed to him. Another tradition places Ruth within the Megilloth. As one of five festival scrolls, it is read on the Feast of Weeks or Shabuoth (Pentecost) in celebration of the harvest. Two versions of this location exist: (1) a *liturgical* order that puts Ruth second, after the Song of Songs, which is read on Passover, and before Lamentations (ninth of Ab), Ecclesiastes (Succoth), and Esther (Purim); (2) a *chronological* order that has Ruth first, followed by Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther. In the latter arrangement Ruth follows Proverbs."

[2] Ibid., 845. The genealogy of David in Ruth 4:18-22 has the family line of Boaz, not Elimelek, Naomi's deceased husband.

[3] Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 24. For a discussion of the view that the critical reading of the David narrative reveals these texts are "royal propaganda" written to explain away David's nefarious actions see Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25-46. For example, McKenzie argues that in truth "David sought to advance himself as king at Saul's expense. [The biblical] defense — David came to Saul at the latter's behest (16:19-22), was completely loyal while there, and did much to help Saul's cause (19:4-5). Marriage to Michal was Saul's idea (as a plot against David, 18:20-21). And David protested his unworthiness" (18:23, 32).

importance of David historically and theologically.[4] As such, there are several ways in which his story contributes to the further revelation of a theology of life after death in the HB. In the story of David and Goliath, David refers to YHWH as "the living God." Through this story, God demonstrates his power over life and death that is reinforced in his encounter with Abigail. The Davidic covenant adds to the language of ongoing life when YHWH promises David a "forever house." Embedded within the story of David and Bathsheba is a theology of unconditional forgiveness for the repentant. The death of their child contains one of the clearest instances in the HB thus far of a belief in an afterlife in community for those who have died. Finally, in the story of David's death, a phraseology is used for the first time in a death narrative that alludes to the resurrection of the dead.

Alter notes:

> The story of David is probably the greatest single narrative representation in antiquity of a human life evolving by slow stages through time, shaped and altered by the pressures of political life, public institutions, family, the impulses of body and spirit, the eventual sad decay of the flesh…And nowhere is the Bible's astringent narrative economy, its ability to define characters and etch revelatory dialogue in a few telling strokes, more brilliantly deployed.[5]

David is described as handsome and healthy (1 Sam 16:12, 18), well spoken (16:18), as a fearless shepherd (17:34-36), and a skilled musician (17:23). His exploits reveal him to be a valiant leader and warrior, and a cunning politician and administrator. David will become "the king par excellence, as the standard for all later kings and as a messianic symbol."[6]

[4] McKenzie, *David,* 27. "The Deuteronomistic History evaluates Israel's history according to the law set forth in Deuteronomy." It includes Deut, Josh, Judg, 1-2 Sam, and 1-2 Kgs.

[5] Alter, *Ancient Israel,* 223. David's story, however, is eclipsed by that of Jesus Christ in the Four Gospels.

[6] D. M. Howard, Jr., "David (Person)" in *AYBD* 2, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 41.

David's charismatic presence elicits strong emotions in the characters around him. Eliab "burns with anger at him" (1 Sam 17:28 NIV). Goliath (17:42 NIV) and Michal (2 Sam 6:16 NIV) are said to despise him. Saul fears (1 Sam 18:12, 29) him. For the most part, however, he is overwhelmingly loved. Saul initially "loved him greatly" (16:21; 18:22). He is loved by Saul's two children, Jonathan (18:1, 3; 20:17; 2 Sam 1:26) and Michal (1 Sam 18:20, 28), who both choose David over their father. "All Israel and Judah loved David" (18:16). All the king's servants loved him (18:22).[7]

Only David is described as a "man after God's own heart" (*lēb*) (1 Sam 13:14), meaning, he never followed idols but 'feared' God. Wolfe observes:

> Acts which are exactly what is 'in Yahweh's heart' also correspond exactly to his will, just as whatever is right in his (incorruptible) eyes does. Samuel says to Saul (I Sam 13:14):
>
> > Your kingdom shall not continue;
> > Yahweh has sought out a man after his own heart;
> > and Yahweh has appointed him to be leader over his people.[8]

That is to say, a man after God's heart is one who is in tune with and obedient to God's will.[9] God sends Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint his chosen replacement for the disobedient King Saul (16:1). Samuel sees David's oldest brother Eliab who shares attributes of Saul (his appearance and

[7] It is interesting to note that David does not say that he loves anyone. When David was distraught over the death of Absalom, Joab accuses him of humiliating all his followers "by showing love for those who hate you and hate for those who love you" (2 Sam 19:7). But those words are never uttered by David. Ps 18:1-2 does speak of David's love for God. "For the leader. Of David, the servant of the LORD, who addressed the words of this song to the LORD after the LORD had saved him from the clutches of Saul. He said: I adore you, O LORD my strength." However, David's adoration is omitted from the rendering of this Psalm in 2 Sam 22.

[8] Wolff, *Anthropology*, 56.

[9] Ibid., 55. Wolfe observes: "The spectrum of meaning of this most frequent anthropological term is a particularly broad one. But though it undoubtedly embraces the whole range of the physical, the emotional and the intellectual, as well as the functions of the will, yet we must clearly hold on to the fact that the Bible primarily views the heart as the center of the consciously living man. The essential characteristic that, broadly speaking, dominates the concept is that the heart is called to reason, and especially to hear the word of God."

stature). The prophet thinks "surely the LORD's anointed stands before him" (16:6). God cautions Samuel not to look at outward appearances. "For not as man sees does the LORD see; man sees only what is visible, but the LORD sees (*ra'ah*)[10] into the heart (*lēb)*" (16:7). Wolfe notes that "although it is concealed from men, it is here [in the heart] that the vital decisions are made."[11] In ch. 2 we argued that the use of the Hebrew word *ra'ah* links Abraham's and Moses' visions of the land to God's view of Creation in Gen 1. As such *ra'ah* contributes to a theology of death to life, as both of these charterers supernaturally beheld a land beyond their physical world. Here God supernaturally sees the heart (*lēb*), "the seat of understanding, or insight in biblical physiology."[12] Wolfe notes that "the heart is at once the organ of understanding and of will."[13] God saw that David's heart was obedient to his will,[14] and as such was a heart after God, for "the heart of God is most often mentioned as the organ of God's distinct will, against which man is judged."[15] David will stray, with both eyes and heart in the story of David and Bathsheba. But even in his darkest hour, we shall see in David's narrative, a theology of ongoing life after death, for although a heart after God may fail, it is always redeemable.

[10] Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 177. "The Lord alone has the capacity to observe and judge a person's 'heart' (*lēb*), that is one's thoughts, emotions and intents." Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 253-54 observes that "the verb *ra'ah* ("see, look") occurs in some form, ten times in this chapter" (16). The whole ch. is about looking and seeing, especially that of God, Samuel, David, and even Jesse (who does not seem to see).

[11] Wolff, *Anthropology,* 4.

[12] Alter, *Ancient Israel, 330.*

[13] Wolff, *Anthropology, 51*. "The Israelite finds it difficult to distinguish linguistically between 'perceiving' and 'choosing,' between 'hearing' and 'obeying.' The linguistic difficulty that ensues for our more differentiating mode of thought comes from the factual impossibility of dividing theory from practice." For a fuller understanding of the many nuanced meanings of *lēb* including the physical heart, feelings, wish, reason, will, and God's heart, see Ibid., 40-58.

[14] Paul reflects the understanding of a heart after God's as one of obedience: "After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; *he will do everything I want him to do"*' (Acts 13:22 TNIV).

[15] Wolff, *Anthropology*, 55.

There are forty-two chapters devoted to the David Story in the HB.[16] The vast amount of material is beyond what we can analyze in this study. As such, we will organize our study of an embedded theology of death to life by dividing the chapters into three time periods in the life of David. Period one (1 Sam 16-31) will include narratives in David's rise to power. The second period (2 Sam 1-24) will encompass stories during David's reign. Period three (1 Kgs 1:1- 2:11) will survey events surrounding his death.

Bergen aptly suggests that "David's life is a literary hologram of the history and destiny of Israel…The author's craftmanship has produced a vision of David that is as big as the nation of Israel, as grand as the covenantal promises of God."[17] Therefore, a theology of ongoing life after death, embedded within the narrative of the great King David shares continuity with the stories of his ancestors. The experiences of David's life mirror those of the nation of Israel, including Torah failure.[18] In addition to looking backward to Moses and the Torah, the David narratives in Samuel and 1 Kings "also looked to the future, giving definition and focus to the messianic tradition."[19]

Alter observes that the skilled author of David's story "defined the meaning of events through allusion, metaphor, and symbol…not to fabricate history, but to understand it."[20] It is in those allusions, metaphors and symbols, that we shall see a theology of death to life in the story of David as he rises to power, becomes king, and finally, at his death.

[16] McKenzie, *David,* 27. The Moses story is told in thirty-four chs. in Deut.
[17] Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 36-37.
[18] Ibid., see Bergen for parallels in the life of David to the patriarchs, Joseph, Moses, wilderness wanderings, exile and more.
[19] Ibid., 46.
[20] Alter, *Ancient Israel,* 231.

5.1.0 A Theology of Death to Life in the Rise of David

David is introduced into the Saul narrative when Samuel anoints him as king. The unassuming eighth son of Jesse, whose heart meets God's standard for the ruler of his people, will replace the reigning, disobedient King Saul.

> Then Samuel asked Jesse, "Are these all the boys you have?" He replied, "There is still the youngest; he is tending the flock." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send someone to bring him, for we will not sit down to eat until he gets here." So they sent and brought him. He was ruddy-cheeked, bright eyed, and handsome. And the LORD said, "Rise and anoint him, for this is the one." Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit (*ru'ah*) of the LORD gripped David from that day on. Samuel then set out for Ramah. Now the spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD began to terrify him. (1 Sam 16:11-14)

The spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, but would be empowering David from his anointing onward. David is the only OT character said to be continually filled with the spirit of the LORD. After he is confronted with his sins of adultery and murder, David pleads with God: "Do not cast me out of your presence, or take your Holy Spirit away from me" (Ps 51:11). Polzin observes that "we are invited by the Deuteronomist to reflect upon how utterly becoming, yet basically irrelevant, is David's uncommon ability to please the eye and the ear. So there is more here than meets the eye."[21] It is the power and presence of Yahweh and his indwelling Spirit that is orchestrating events in the life of David. The evil spirit that torments Saul, leading to David's summons to court because he is "skilled in music; a stalwart fellow and a warrior, sensible in speech, and handsome in appearance, and the LORD is with him" (16:18). The presence of the *ru'ah* of God at the beginning of David's story echoes the Creation event. Just as God's Spirit was present and active at the creation of the world, so too he is at hand in the creation of David's

[21] Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History: 1 Samuel* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 156.

monarchy. David's debut speaks to a theology of ongoing life, for not only does it reflect the death to life theology in the Creation event, it foreshadows the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, guaranteeing salvation and life after death in the NT.[22] It is a further revelation by God of his plan for eternal life, seen for the first time in Scripture.

The story of David's rise to power spans some twenty chapters and is full of political intrigue and theological underpinnings. We will explore two such narratives in David's pre-monarchical period: the story of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17) and the encounter of David and Abigail (1 Sam 25).

5.1.1 A Theology of Death to Life in the Story of David and Goliath

Perhaps the most well-known story in the HB, the saga of David and Goliath, has become a metaphor for the resourceful underdog who overcomes insurmountable odds to achieve victory over a superior adversary. However, as Bergen rightly argues:

> The biblical narrative is not primarily a story about human courage and effort; instead, it is about the awesome power of a life built around bold faith in the Lord. Like the story of Jonathan earlier (cf. I4:1-23), this account demonstrates the power of a single faith-filled life to inspire an entire army to victory and the vulnerability of all who 'defy the armies of the living God' (vv. 26, 36) when confronted by individuals who possess courageous faith in the Lord. [23]

The account of David and Goliath is the longest of all the Davidic narratives, highlighting its theological importance. Alter notes that the prospective of the preceding stories of Samuel's anointing of David is vertical. The coming of the Spirit to David at his anointing and the removal of the Spirit from Saul is from God to man. By contrast the elaborate description of the placement

[22] 2 Cor 1:21-22; Eph 1:13-14.
[23] Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 187.

of the Israelite and Philistine troops and the description of Goliath's intimidating war gear[24] imagines "a richly elaborated horizontal deployment of troops and individuals."[25] This strategy enables the author to infuse this frightening encounter with the presence of YHWH, whom David knows to be an all-powerful rescuer.

There are many repetitions within the story. The giant Goliath sallies forth from the Philistine camp three times to utter his threatening words to the "armies of Israel" (17:10, 16, 23). The reward offered by Saul for whomever defeats Goliath is repeated three times (vv. 25, 27, 30). The name of the LORD is conspicuously absent from the events transpiring in Saul's camp — twice we are told that dismay and terror (vv. 11, 25) carry the day as the *army of Israel* cowers in fear of death. However, David will twice refer to the ranks as the *army of the living God* (vv. 26, 36). These repetitions, rather than reflecting the scholarly opinion that they are due to the use of different sources, serve to highlight theological lessons embedded within the text. It is into this artfully arranged scene, brimming with tension and fear, that the Spirit-filled David appears and utters his first words.

> While he was talking to them, the champion, whose name was Goliath, the Philistine of Gath, stepped forward from the Philistine ranks and spoke the same words as before; and David heard him. When the men of Israel saw the man, they fled in terror. And the men of Israel were saying [among themselves], "Do you see that man coming out? He comes out to defy Israel! The man who kills him will be rewarded by the king with great riches; he will also give him his daughter in marriage and grant exemption to his father's house in Israel." David asked the men standing near him, "What will be done for the man who kills that Philistine and removes the disgrace from Israel? Who is that uncircumcised Philistine that he dares defy the ranks of the living God?" (1 Sam 17:23-26)

[24] Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 109. "This passage presents the longest description of military attire in the OT. Goliath's physical stature, armor, weaponry, and shield bearer must have made him appear invincible."

[25] Alter, *Ancient Israel,* 334. Alter notes that "the 'Homeric' enumeration of armor and weapons is quite untypical of the Hebrew Bible."

We have noted that a person's first words in the biblical narrative often serve as a defining moment of characterization. Alter understands David's first recorded words as politically motivated ("what will be done for the man…?"). "The inquiry about personal profit is then immediately balanced (or covered up) by the patriotic pronouncement, 'who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the battle lines of the living God.'"[26] Bodner and Johnson also offer a possible critical reading of David's first words:

> A number of scholars have noted the potentially negative way that David is characterized by his opening speech. Marti Steussy argues, for example, that David 'has one eye on God, but the other watches greedily for reward' (17:26)…David, in other words, may have a veneer or at least modicum of piety and patriotism, but what likely motivates him is his ambition. What readings that utilize this strategy show is that the text allows for and may even suggest a predominantly negative portrayal of David.[27]

However, one must question why the author includes the previous scenes, emphasizing that David is God's choice, shares God's heart and is talented and winsome, only to portray him as greedy and ambitious in the next. In addition, speaking from a practical point of view, does this eighth son, a mere shepherd, actually, at this time, have aspirations to the throne? Furthermore, if David is going to be the king that all future kings are to be measured by, why choose to negatively characterized him by his first words? We propose David's question concerning what will be done should be interpreted theologically. They serve to refocus the horizon to include YHWH, the pivotal figure in the narrative. In order to accomplish this, we will analyze the second part of David's speech first.

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[26] Alter, *Ancient Israel,* 338.

[27] Keith Bodner and Benjamin J. M. Johnson. "David: Kaleidoscope of a King," in *Characters and Characterizations in the Book of Samuel*, eds. Keith Bodner and Benjamin J. M. Johnson (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 126. Or perhaps David is voicing a youthful curiosity about what the reward might be.

David's initial words in this skillfully composed narrative should be understood in the context in which they appear. That is, strategically placed after the anointing of David and his reception of the Spirit, and before the contest between David and Goliath. It is from David's lips that the army is identified for the first time as "the ranks of *the living God*."[28] As such, a theological interpretation of David's speech hints at a theology of death to life in this story, for an army without the living God is destined for death. Obedience and faith in the living God leads to life on the battlefield, a metaphor for ongoing life after death.

As Polzin aptly observes, "no one in this chapter emphasizes the interest of God more than David does."[29] He notes that 17:1-24 are for the most part, narration, whereas after David arrives in camp (vv. 25-47) the text is chiefly composed of three dialogues; David with the ranks (vv. 25-30), with Saul (vv. 31-39), and with Goliath (vv. 43-47). Polzin argues that "this section's emphasis on dialogue allows a change of perspective based mostly on hearing what was said, so that much of its formal stylization necessarily centers around the *repetition of reported speech*."[30]

In his dialogue with Saul, David repeats the phrase, "the ranks of the living God" for the second time.

> "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and that uncircumcised Philistine shall end up like one of them, for he has defied the ranks of the living God. The LORD," David went on, "who saved me from lion and bear will also save me from that Philistine." (1 Sam 17:36-37)[31]

[28] Polzin, *1 Samuel,* 170. This is as opposed to Goliath in 17:10 and the Israelites in v. 25 who refer to the army as simply "the ranks of Israel."

[29] Polzin, *1 Samuel,* 170.

[30] Ibid., 167.

[31] After this speech of David, Saul seeks to arm David with his own armor, helmet and sword (vv. 38-39), highlighting his spiritual blindness. Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 190 observes in the previous pericope during Samuel's anointing of David, "the reader has just been warned against paying undo attention to outward appearances."

God has snatched David from the jaws of death in the past and he will do so again. In his speech to Goliath, David again repeats the same concept of the "ranks of the living God" using slightly different language. "David replied to the Philistine, 'you come against me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come against you in the name of the LORD of Hosts, the God of the ranks of Israel, whom you have defied'" (v. 45). In this speech, David refers to God as YHWH, who is the living God, and again associates him with the ranks. Brueggemann notes:

> By his bold speech David introduces a new factor into the action: the "living God." Israel, who faces the Philistine threat in fear and immobility, acts as if God were irrelevant to the battle. If God is irrelevant in the face of the Philistines, all is lost for the Israelites. But David will not have it so. For David it is unthinkable to assess a battle (or anything else) apart from the rule of the living God.[32]

The first reference in the HB to God as the "living God" is Deut 5:21-23. After Moses receives the Ten Commandments, the tribal leaders and elders approach him saying:

> The LORD our God has just shown us His majestic Presence, and we have heard His voice out of the fire; we have seen this day that man may live though God has spoken to him, Let us not die, then, for this fearsome fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer, we shall die. For what mortal ever heard the voice of the living God speak out of fire as we did, and lived?[33]

The text goes on to say that God was pleased with the plea of the people for Moses to mediate going forward. "I have heard the plea that this people made to you; they did well to speak thus" (v. 26). Craigie writes: "It was the exceptional occurrence that terrified the people and reminded them of their mortality. It is easy to have too small a view of God in the mind, but the experience of the presence of God may shatter the inadequacy of such a view and impress rather the

[32] Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012), 128.

[33] Deut 5:23 in JPSTT is Deut 5:24-26 in Christian translations.

awesomeness of the living God."[34] David's use of this name echoes the first use in the Torah in a context that emphasizes God's immanence and power. Perhaps David's use of it here was meant to highlight those ideas as well.[35] At any rate, those who deserved death in the Moses passage, lived on. Furthermore, there are three other instances of God as "the living God" in the historical books, Josh 3:10; 2 Kgs 19:4; and 19:16. All occur in a context where God is about to deliver his people from their enemies,[36] that is from impending death to ongoing life.

In addition, David repeats the double meaning the victory over Goliath will achieve — *all the earth may know* that there is a God in Israel and that *Israel will know* that YHWH gives victory over death by his own might, not man-made weapons (vv. 47-48).[37] Bergen notes that the weapons used by David (a stick and stones) "were not products of human artifice; rather they were shaped by God" and that by refusing to wear Saul's clothing and use his weapons in favor of his own clothes and sling David "would identify with the great shepherd [rather than warriors] leaders of the Torah — Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and especially Moses — and live by faith in the [covenantal] promises of God."[38] Brueggemann supposes:

> We must not miss the theological turn in the narrative. David, knowing the true answer, poses the question to his fellows. Is there a living God in Israel? Is there a God who can, as Hannah sang, "give life and give death"? Is there a working power and a governance outside the scope of the armies that relativizes the power and danger noticed at first glance? David of course answers yes to his questions and is prepared to act 'as if' it were so.[39]

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[34] Craigie, *Deuteronomy,* 165.

[35] Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 192.

[36] Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel,* 2nd ed. WBC 10, ed. Bruce M. Metzger *et al.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 178. "The references to a living God in vv. 26 and 36 (cf. 2 Kgs 19:4) come in a context where a foreigner has slandered Israel's God. In Jer 10:6 -10, the living God is contrasted with idols. The giant's attempt to curse David by his (dead) god is ineffective (v. 43)." In a similar story in 2 Kgs 19:6, the king of Assyria blasphemes YHWH.

[37] Polzin, *1 Samuel,* 171.

[38] Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 194 (brackets mine).

[39] Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 129.

Keeping in mind the theological import of the second part of David's speech, we will now address his first words: "What will be done for the man who kills that Philistine and removes the disgrace from Israel?" (17:26).

Klein notes, "David asked a question whose answer has already been supplied to the reader, but he thereby puts the challenge in its proper theological perspective: This man is an uncircumcised Philistine (cf. 14:6). He is a reproach to Israel since he has himself reproached/challenged the battle ranks of the living God."[40] David was aware of the living God's awesome power over those who had blasphemed[41] and disobeyed him in the past.[42] However, Saul, his troops, and Goliath failed to identify the ranks with the living God. They were merely the army of Israel (17:8, 10, 25). As such, any rewards offered were limited to what Saul could provide, and paled in comparison to the rewards available to those who are obedient to YHWH. David's insistence on hearing "what will be done for the man who kills that Philistine" is not due to ambitious greed or political gain. Rather he has "what will be done" repeated three times in order to diminish what is offered.[43] It is as if to say, "Let me get this straight, you are the army of the living God and have been presented with an opportunity to let the world and the people know that he is sovereign, and the reward you seek is financial gain, a princess and tax cuts? Do you not understand the power and privilege that is available to the ranks of the living God? Do you not

[40] Klein, *1 Samuel,* 178.

[41] Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 195. Bergen notes that ironically, the penalty according to Torah for anyone who blasphemes the name of YHWH is death by stoning (Lev 24:13-16), which is exactly how David kills Goliath.

[42] Philip F. Esler, "Abigail: A Woman of Wisdom and Decisive Action" in *Characters and Characterization in the Book of Samuel*, eds. Keith Bodner and Benjamin J. M. Johnson (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 167-82. Esler observes David's "closeness to the Lord had been a central feature in his life to this point, with the Lord having looked into his heart and liked what he saw (1 Sam. 16:7), and with David reciprocating, by being the only Israelite who saw Goliath's insult to Israel as an insult to Israel's God" (1 Sam. 17:26) (181).

[43] R. L. Omanson and J. Ellington, *A Handbook on the First Book of Samuel* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2001), 366-67. "David's questions underline the fact that Goliath is an uncircumcised Philistine who is defying the living God of Israel, and that David is truly a pious man. David's questions do not mean that he is asking for more specific information about the riches promised. Nor do they suggest that he is asking why a reward should be given at all to an Israelite who does his duty by killing this enemy, or that David did not hear what is recorded in the previous verse."

remember that it is the living God who gave you the law of life and this land? It is the living God who will save your life and slay Goliath." Omanson and Ellington aptly observe, "the theological and literary aspect of the text is missed here by…a literal translation of this verse."[44]

David's words and deeds in the story of his contest with Goliath contribute to and identify with the theology of ongoing life found in the narratives of the patriarchs and Moses that are associated with the living God who is the God of the living. God's actions to deliver David and the ranks from certain death to life are symbolic of his plan for his people. That is YHWH's demonstration that he is able to save David and the ranks from death in impossible circumstances, illustrates analogically that he is able to save them from the ultimate circumstance — death itself.

5.1.2 A Theology of Death to Life in the Story of David and Abigail

The thrilling story of David and Abigail is filled with suspense, intrigue and a touch of romance.[45] Through her courageous, pious resourcefulness, the beautiful and intelligent[46] Abigail dissuades David from avenging his honor by killing every male in her household.[47] It is to the language of her dialogue with David that we shall turn to find a theology of death to life embedded within their story.

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[44] Omanson and Ellington, *Handbook on 1 Samuel* 367.

[45] McKenzie, *David,* 33 argues for a critical understanding of David in this story. "David murdered Nabal and seized his wife Abigail and his property. [The biblical] *defense*—Nabal was a mean-spirited fool who deserved to die (1 Sam 25:3, 17, 25). David was prevented from killing him by God through Abigail (25:18-34). It was Yahweh who struck Nabal, and Abigail married David of her own free will" (25:38, 41-42) (brackets mine).

[46] Esler, "Abigail," 169. Esler observes: "The combination of beauty and intelligence (with the word discretion [טעם] also used of Abigail in 1 Sam. 25:33) in a woman is not unknown to the HB, since it is implied in Prov. 11:22 by the problem of someone who has the former but not the latter. Nevertheless, Abigail is the only woman expressly described as possessing both qualities. Accordingly, the combination of the two features here is highly significant for the story."

[47] Polzin, *1 Samuel,* 211 notes that "David requests food from someone whose life is subsequently put in jeopardy by the request: Saul kills Ahimelech and his entire house for giving food, while David wants to kill Nabal and his house for refusing it. The difference between the two is that the LORD is said to have restrained David from murdering his enemy (25:26, 33)." David, filled with the Spirit and with a heart after God's, grants life to Nabal and his household, whereas the disobedient Saul kills the LORD's priests.

Chapters 18-23 continue the contrast between David and Saul that was evident in the David and Goliath story. A theology of ongoing life and death is symbolized by the lives of these two men. The actions of the LORD's anointed David result in ongoing life, whereas the disobedience of Saul leads to death. David grows in popularity and military prowess (18:5-7, 30). Saul seeks to have David killed in battle (18:25) and attempts to pin him to the wall with his spear (19:10). The reader is also aware that the Spirit-filled David seeks the will of God and receives divine guidance in all of his actions (22:5; 23:4, 10, 12). However, Saul relies on the hearsay of others, including a conniving Edomite (22:8,9) resulting in dire consequences. Saul orders the murder of eighty-five priests as well as every man, woman, child, infant and the livestock in the village of Nob (22:9-19). David, on the other hand, is repeatedly sparing life. He offers refuge to the one priest who escapes Saul's massacre saying: "I knew that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would tell Saul. I am to blame for all the deaths in your father's house. Stay with me; do not be afraid; for whoever seeks your life must seek my life also. It will be my care to guard you" (22:22-23).[48] David then rescues the people of Keilah from the Philistines (23:1-6). The contrast between Saul and David is most notable when David spares the household of those who offended him, but Saul kills the households that opposed him.

Polzin notes that the story of David and Abigail in 1 Sam 25 is placed strategically between the two accounts of David sparing the life of Saul in chapters 24 and 26. He observes that "Nabal is obviously related to the Saul of 24 and 26 insofar as he is a similar object of mercy: David chooses not to kill the man who has returned evil for good."[49] The literary technique of identifying Nabal with Saul allows the death of Nabal to foreshadow the death of Saul, and highlights the fact

[48] Doeg reports rather misleadingly, concerning the priest Ahimelech's arming and provisioning David's men (cf. 21:1-9 to 22:9-10).

[49] Polzin, *1 Samuel,* 210-211.

that the LORD and not David determines the fate of both men. Abigail's speech to David, as she seeks to atone for the foolishness of her husband Nabal, is the longest of any woman in the HB[50] and as such is significant. God uses her words and actions to restrain David from wholesale slaughter. That is to enable ongoing life for the males of Nabal's household. Just as Rachel's death in childbirth and the resourceful interventions of the women in the birth account of Moses to ensure his life contain allusions to ongoing life after death, the woman Abigail's highly theological dialogue (25:23-30) contains several hints of just such a theology associated with the life and future kingship of David.

> When Abigail saw David, she quickly dismounted from the ass and threw herself face down before David, bowing to the ground. Prostrate at his feet, she pleaded, "Let the blame be mine, my lord, but let your handmaid speak to you; hear your maid's plea. Please, my lord, pay no attention to that wretched fellow Nabal. For he is just what his name says: His name means 'boor'[51] and he is a boor. Your handmaid did not see the young men whom my lord sent. I swear, my lord, as the LORD lives and as you live — the LORD who has kept you from seeking redress by blood with your own hands — let your enemies and all who would harm my lord fare like Nabal! Here is the present (*b^{e}rākâ*) [52] which your maidservant has brought to my lord; let it be given to the young men who are the followers of my lord. Please pardon your maid's boldness. For the LORD will grant my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and no wrong is ever to be found in you. And if anyone sets out to pursue you and seek your life, the life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life in the care of the LORD; but He will fling away the lives of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling. And when the LORD has accomplished for my lord all the good He has promised you, and has appointed you ruler of Israel, do not let this be a cause of stumbling and of faltering courage to my lord that you have shed blood needlessly and that my lord sought redress with his own hands. And when the LORD has prospered my lord, remember your maid." (1 Sam 25:23-31)

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[50] Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 249. Bergen notes that although the song of Deborah (Judg 5:20-31) is longer, it is also sung by Barak and not Deborah alone.

[51] The JPSTT translates the Hebrew word *nābāl* as" boor" rather than the more common "fool." The TNIV has "he is just like his name means Fool (*nābāl*) and folly (*nēbālâ*) goes with him" (25:25).

[52] Alter, *Ancient Israel,* 390 cites Jewish scholar Moshe Garsiel's apt observation that the blessing or gifts Abigail bestows upon David "alludes to the moment in Gen 33 when Jacob is reunited with his brother Esau: Esau too, approaches dauntingly with four hundred armed men; Jacob, like Abigail, prostrates himself before the figure he fears; and he, too, has brought with him generous tribute to be offered in conciliation, which he refers to not as a 'gift' (*minhah*) but as a 'blessing' (*b^{e}rākâ*)." This allusion to a Jacob narrative where God delivers Jacob from death by his brother to life is echoed in this story of David and Abigail.

Abigail is described as acting quickly (*māhar*) three times in the story.[53] The first occurrence is her quick (*māhar*) act in response to the news of Nabal's actions (v. 18). The second occurs when she quickly (*māhar*) dismounts from her donkey to confront David (v. 23). Finally, she quickly (*māhar*) mounts her donkey to meet David and becomes his wife (v. 42). Her quick actions contain theological implications, for they echo the behavior of several of her illustrious ancestors. The same Hebrew root word *māhar* is also used three times in the narratives of Abraham and Sarah, Rebekah, and Joseph at key junctures where God's plan for a theology of ongoing life is embedded within their stories. Abraham hurries (*māhar*) to his tent, instructing Sarah to quick (*māhar*) prepare a meal. Then he selects a calf and his servant hurries (*māhar*) to prepare it for the three heavenly visitors (Gen 18:6-7). It is at this time the LORD informs Abraham and Sarah that they will have a son (18:13). Rebekah quickly (*māhar*) gives water to Abraham's servant and his camels three times (Gen 24:18, 20, 46). Her actions prove her to be the wife, chosen by God for Isaac. Rebekah will go on to give birth to Jacob (Israel). Joseph hurries out (*māhar*) to weep after seeing his brothers (Gen 43:30), and instructs his brothers to hurry (*māhar*) back to their father (45:13) and bring him to Egypt quickly (*māhar*) (45:13). There, the Hebrew people will flourish and multiply symbolizing ongoing life for the people of God. Abigail's initial actions allow the reader to link her to God's plan for ongoing life.

Esler notes that her intelligence exhibited in her words and deeds, "aligns with her closeness to the LORD God as seen in how she addresses David."[54] Furthermore, Bergen observes that the Hebrew root word to express Abigail's intelligence (*śkl*) (1 Sam 25:3) is the same word

[53] Klein, *1 Samuel,* 249. "The clever Abigail knew what she had to do and she did it quickly (cf. vv. 23, 34, 42). "In addition, David attributes Abigail's quickness to the saving of the lives of Nabal's male household members (v. 34).

[54] Esler, "Abigail," 171.

used previously to describe David (18:5, 30). "This subtle lexical connection begins to lay a foundation for future connections that will arise between these two individuals."[55] David and Abigail are on the same theological page, so to speak, and together illustrate that an obedient relationship with YHWH leads to life. As such we will look briefly at three verses from Abigail's speech that allude to a theology of death to life (25:26, 28, 29).

Abigail refers to YHWH seven times in her speech. The repetition of the name seven times is surely intentional, for this is the name of God that is associated with life. The use of the name seven times links Abigail's words to Creation and as such, life. The initial use is in v. 26, "I swear, my lord, as the LORD lives and as you live — the LORD who has kept you from seeking redress by blood with your own hands — let your enemies and all who would harm my lord fare like Nabal!"[56] Her words are filled with life. As surely as YHWH lives, David lives, and needless death is averted; a metaphor for a theology of death to life for the obedient people of God.

Abigail presents David with a blessing to atone for the insults of her husband (25:27) and then boldly "prophetically expresses YHWH's ultimate design for David as leader over Israel with a lasting dynasty."[57] "Please pardon your maid's boldness. For the LORD will grant my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and no wrong is ever to be found in you" (v. 28). Her words prophesy the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:5-16).[58] Klein comments that "Abigail joined the chorus of those prophesying David's kingship (Samuel (1 Sam

[55] Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 246.

[56] Klein, *1 Samuel,* 250 states, "Abigail prays that David's enemies and those who seek to do him harm will be cursed just like Nabal. In the context one of these foes would be Saul."

[57] Joy Osgood, "1, 2, Samuel," in *IVPWBC*, eds. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 168 notes, "If Nabal was Saul's alter ego, then Abigail is Jonathan's, acting decisively to redeem the situation by doing what Nabal should have done (1 Sam 25:18; cf. 13:3; 14:1). Like Jonathan, she chose not to tell her nearest kin of her actions (25:19 is almost an exact parallel to 14:1), but set out for a personal encounter with David in the desert (25:19-20)."

[58] We will discuss a theology of death to life in the Davidic covenant in section 5.2.1.

16:13), Jonathan (1 Sam 23:17), Saul (1 Sam 24:20)).”[59] As we shall see, David’s kingship, with its messianic implications, is infused with a theology of ongoing life.

The final allusion to a theology of death to life in Abigail’s speech echoes David’s defeat of Goliath and foreshadows the death of Nabal: “And if anyone sets out to pursue you and seek your life, the life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life in the care of the LORD; but He will fling away the lives of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling” (v. 29). Polzin observes:

> When Abigail invokes the image of God slinging out the life of David’s enemies as from the hollow of a sling (25:29), an allusion to David’s miraculous defeat of Goliath in chapter 17 is hard to avoid. When we read there that David ‘put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it’ (17:49), and then read [in 25:37] that Abigail’s news caused Nabal[60] to become as a stone (25:37), the allusive circle is complete: David’s enemy has been slung out like a stone from his sling, an allusion to David’s victory over Saul as much as Goliath.[61]

Abigail’s remarks remind David that just as YHWH protected his life in the battle with Goliath, ‘flinging away his life from the hollow of his sling,’ God would continue to protect David from

[59] Klein, *1 Samuel,* 251.

[60] The death narrative of Nabal, and its many facets, is beyond the scope of this chapter. See Wolff, *Anthropology,* 40-41. Wolff presents an interesting study of 1 Sam 26:37, “…his heart failed him and he became like a stone” (TNIV). Another area of interest in the death of Nabal is the idea that David benefits from his death when he marries Abigail and therefore could have had something to do with his demise. Aside from the fact that the text states that the LORD was behind his death (25:38), Esler makes a case that Abigail did not inherit at all. Esler, “Abigail,” 170 writes, “For in a patrilineal society such as this, if Nabal died, Abigail would not inherit his property, since it would pass instead to the nearest heir on his patriline. This point is regularly misunderstood by interpreters who automatically and erroneously assume that after Nabal’s death David acquired his property when he married Abigail. In fact, it does appear that Abigail’s dowry was a very limited one, consisting of the one ass and her five maidens who accompanied her when she went off to become David’s wife (v. 42). No gold or silver, jewelry or fine clothes are mentioned. All this suggests that she came from a family that was not particularly wealthy and which could not provide her with an ample dowry. By way of comparison, in Genesis 24 the arrangements for Rebekah’s betrothal to Isaac involve Abraham, through his servant, giving rich presents to her brother and mother (these being akin to a bride-price), as well as silver and gold jewelry and rich clothes to Rebekah, while her family sends her off with camels and servants, these constituting a dowry” (Gen 24:53, 61). My thanks, however, to Dr. Sarah Bollinger for her observations that five maids are a large number and “may represent a great deal of wealth that is not detailed. Another possibility is that she took these women with her who otherwise may have been dispersed to other households to save them from that fate.”

[61] Polzin, *1 Samuel,* 211-12. For a further discussion of the parallels between Saul and Nabal, see 210-213; Alter, *Ancient Israel,* 330; Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 251-52.

his enemies. David will be securely "bound up in the bundle (*ṣᵉrôr*) of life in the care of the LORD."

The Hebrew word "bundle" (*ṣᵉrôr*), meaning "a bag, bundle, pouch or purse…used figuratively of a bundle holding persons' lives in security (1 Sam 25:29)…or a pebble, a piece of grain,"[62] occurs only here in the HB. There is some scholarly controversy as to its meaning. Klein argues that *ṣᵉrôr* is similar to the Hebrew term *sēper*, defined as "a document, writing, a book, a scroll."[63] As such he interprets this term as referring to the book of life (Exod 32:32, 33). Therefore, "to be excluded from the bundle of the living or the book of life would mean to die."[64] Alter claims "a more plausible identification is the pouch in which little stones keeping a tally of live sheep were placed."[65] The identity of the living sheep dwell securely within the pouch. Both interpretations speak to a theology of ongoing life. As such perhaps this is an instance of biblical punning. One whose name is written in YHWH's book (*sēper*) of life is indeed bound up by him in the bundle (*ṣᵉrôr*) of life. They remain in the care of the LORD forever. Abigail's prophetic words contain a beautiful metaphor for ongoing life in the presence of YHWH. This story, as with the story of David and Goliath, demonstrates YHWH's power over life and death. In addition, Abigail's speech, incorporating the name of YHWH, the living God, seven times, and her foreshadowing of the Davidic covenant allude to a theology of ongoing life embedded within the text.

[62] Baker and Carpenter, *CWSDOT,* 968.
[63] Ibid, 789.
[64] Klein, *1 Samuel,* 251. Alter, *Ancient Israel,* 391 notes that "Kyle McCarter, Jr., following Tur-Sinai, has claimed that bundle (*ṣᵉrôr*) actually means document or book."
[65] Alter, *Ancient Israel,* 391.

5.2 A Theology of Death to Life in the Reign of David

Following the deaths of Saul and his sons (1 Sam 31:1-13), David is anointed king over Judah in Hebron (2 Sam 1-7). There, at the age of twenty-three, he will begin a seven-year reign over Judah. At the age of thirty, David will become king of Israel, uniting the monarchies of Judah and Israel (2-5:5). He captures Jerusalem and establishes it as his capital. During his forty-year reign, David will build an empire that reaches from Egypt to Mesopotamia.[66]

The stories of the Davidic covenant and that of David and Bathsheba, the zenith and nadir of David's reign, are each infused with a theology of death to life. The former pictures God's redemptive plan for those who are obedient, the latter offers hope for forgiveness and restoration for those who fall. Just like all of humankind, the great King David will succumb to disobedience. However, the story of David and Bathsheba illustrates that although there are consequences to sin, God offers hope for ongoing life after death for those who repent.

5.2.1 A Theology of Death to Life in the Davidic Covenant

2 Samuel 7 consists of two parts: God's divine oracle in which he communicates his plan to build a perpetual, unconditional house or dynasty for David (1-17), and David's prayerful response (18-19).[67] Brueggemann notes:

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[66] Howard, "David," 41.

[67] There has been much scholarly debate concerning the interpretation of 2 Sam 7. The battles regarding its unity, date, purpose, sources, redaction and the like which began in the nineteenth century continue to rage. Arguments range from ch. 7 as a composition to explain why Solomon, and not David, built the temple (Mowinckel 1963) to the *Königsnovelle* hypothesis which compares God's oracle to Egyptian literature regarding temple building and royal theology (Herrmann 1953-1954). McCarter proposes three redactional phases of ch. 7: A temple phase that associated David with the temple even though he did not build it, a prophetic phase that diminished the importance of the temple as David's success was due to YHWH, and finally a Deuteronomistic redaction in order to bring the temple back into a positive light and thereby support the Solomonic temple. As such, David did not build the temple because it was not the right time. For a fuller discussion of the history of scholarly arguments concerning ch.7 see: A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel,* WBC 11, eds. David Allen Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 112-16; P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. *II Samuel,* ABC 9 (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 210-231. However, rather than jumping through so many textual and form critical hoops, we will interpret the text theologically in its canonical form. Robert Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist: 2 Samuel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 71 observes: "One way to focus upon that reported speech of the LORD we call Nathan's oracle is to appreciate the complex voice structure

> This ideological utterance is the root of evangelical faith in the Bible: that is, faith that relies on the free promise of the gospel. Heretofore God's commitments to Israel are regularly and characteristically conditional. They are governed by the ominous 'if' of ethical requirement [that] depends on Israel's obedience … With David, however, the 'if' has disappeared. Now it is 'but' (v. 15), a conjunction that might here be rendered 'nevertheless.' There are no acts of disobedience in purview which can make Yahweh terminate this profound commitment. In this astonishing promise, Yahweh has … radically shifted the theological foundations of Israel. This is not to say there will not be sanctions and punishments, but they are not terminal. This is a powerful, clear articulation of 'justification by grace'... God loves unconditionally. This ideological utterance is the taproot of the messianic idea in ancient Israel. [68]

Gordon remarks that "various aspects of 2 Sam 7 point to the Davidic covenant as a reflection of the Abrahamic covenant…Interaction between the two covenant traditions would follow as a natural corollary from the recognition of the Davidic kingdom as in some way fulfilling the promises made to Abraham."[69] We have argued that the Abrahamic promises of land and progeny, as well as other literary allusions in the patriarchal narratives, are metaphorical for ongoing life after death. The echoes of the Abrahamic covenant serve to link the two narratives

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through which the oracle conveys meaning. Once we see the care with which authorial or editorial hands have fashioned God's words in verses 5-16, we may be less inclined to dissolve or deny its integrity in endless efforts to reconstruct its literary history." Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 336 aptly asserts: "The LORD's words recorded here constitute the longest recorded monologue attributed to him since the days of Moses (197 words). The prodigious size of this divine pronouncement suggests that the writer intended it to be interpreted as centrally important — perhaps on a plane with the Torah itself." A theological understanding of God's refusal to accede to David's desire to build a temple realizes that it is YHWH alone who will decide when, where, and whom will build the place where he chooses for his name to dwell. Nathan's initial consent to David to proceed with his plans was a reaction based on the fact that he was aware that "the LORD was with him [David]" (2 Sam 7:3) and assumed God would approve. As Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 254 rightly supposes, "in verse 3 Nathan's permit is in his own voice. In verses 5-7 the voice is that of Yahweh…The royal apparatus is not able to make Yahweh its patron." Alter, *Ancient Israel,* 462 observes that 1 Chron 22:8 cites David's acts of bloodshed as the reason he did not build the temple. However, "here the argument God makes is that it is an act of presumption for a mere mortal to build a temple for the unhoused God of Israelite history. But this line of reasoning actually enhances the theological importance of Solomon's temple, for it suggests that God Himself will build a house when He is good and ready, using the human agency He chooses."

[68] Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 257.

[69] Robert P. Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1984), 76-77, observes: "According to one suggestion, that development may be traced to David's period of rule from Hebron (cf. 2 Sam. 2:1-4; 3:2-5; 5:1-5), a city with an honorable place in the Abrahamic tradition. This relationship, that of promise and fulfilment between the two covenants is signaled in the corresponding references to 'name' (2 Sam. 7:9 // Gen. 12:2) and 'seed' (2 Sam. 7:12 // Gen. 15:3f.)."

and provide a foundation for a theology of death to life. As such, the Davidic covenant is, in turn, able to add significantly to the understanding of a theology of eternal life embedded within the text.

Brueggemann observes that "indeed, the whole of Mosaic faith, sounded by Joshua and Samuel as well, is that God's good inclination depends on Israel's obedience."[70] Therefore, although Moses's story contains a robust theology of life after death, his disobedience precluded him from more than a vision of the land. In the David story, Saul lost his throne because of his disobedience. Furthermore, his behavior is contrasted with the obedience of David. However, it is in the words of the unconditional Davidic covenant that we begin to see the language of perpetuity of relationship in the presence of God, despite disobedience, for those who truly repent. The emphasis in the chapter on God's promise to build for David "a house that will last forever" has led commentators to contrast the unconditional covenant God makes with the house of David and that of the Mosaic covenant.[71] That is not to say that a theology of death to life is absent from the actual death of Moses. Rather the David story introduces new theological language that furthers its revelation.

A theology of ongoing life after death embedded in the story of the Davidic covenant may be realized in the repetition of three keywords: "LORD" (YHWH), "house," and "forever." We propose that the LORD's promises to David of an unconditional, "forever" "house," broaden the revelation of a theology of death to life embedded in the earlier covenantal narratives. The word

[70] Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 257.

[71] Hamilton, *Handbook,* 317. Hamilton argues that the unconditional nature of "forever" needs to be qualified by the promise of perpetual priesthood that was withdrawn from Eli (1 Sam 2:30). However, Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 259 supposes that "sound interpretation requires us to recognize that while the covenantal 'if' is silenced in this theology, it has not been nullified." Also Polzin, *2 Samuel*, 80 asserts that "the forever in God's promise to the priestly house of Eli is not entirely revoked by the sins of Eli's sons or by Eli's complicity in such wrongdoing. Instead, God turns perpetual privilege into perpetual punishment. God decides that Eli's house shall endure in ignominy and without hope of future forgiveness (1 Sam 2:36)…With Eli's house, God turns perpetual election into an enduring existence that constitutes permanent rejection."

"forever" (*'ad 'ôlām*) occurs eight times in this chapter. It appears more often here than in any other chapter in Samuel and Kings.[72] Not only does the use of the keyword "forever" contribute to the formulation of messianic hope in Israel, we shall show that its repetition here contributes to a theology of ongoing life after death.

The name LORD (YHWH) appears twenty times in chapter seven.[73] We observed in chapter four that the name YHWH, in essence means life without beginning or end and realizes God's power to create and sustain life. From beginning to end, the Davidic covenant is infused, in almost every verse, by a theology of ongoing life through the repetition of the name YHWH. "God will establish the Davidic throne and the kingdom will dwell secure forever. The focus is not on David's successor, who is not named, but on the promise of an eternal, royal line."[74] The permanence of this promise does not depend on David. Rather it is guaranteed because YHWH has declared it (7: 5, 8, 11). Hamilton argues that "the two most important words in this chapter are "house" and "forever."[75] We would argue that the most important word is YHWH. The living God is everywhere in this pivotal chapter! His powerful faithful name guarantees his promise of a forever house.

The Hebrew word "house" (*bayit*) [76] occurs fifteen times in chapter seven. In two instances *bayit* connotes a palace (vv. 1, 2), four a temple (vv. 5, 6, 7, 13), seven a dynasty (vv. 11, 16, 19,

[72] Hamilton, *Handbook,* 317. Eight of its thirty-three uses are found here. It is used by God three times (vv. 13, 16 [2x]) and by David five times (vv. 24, 25, 26, 29 [2x])

[73] 2 Sam 7:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 11 (2x), 18 (2x), 19 (2x), 20, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29. Of the twelve remaining verses in the chs. all but two (vv. 16-17) contain at least one pronoun of YHWH.

[74] Craig E. Morrison, *2 Samuel,* BOSHNP, ed. Jerome T. Walsh (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 101.

[75] Hamilton, *Handbook*, 317.

[76] Baker and Carpenter, *CWSDOT*, 131: *bayit*: A noun meaning house, dwelling, family, temple, palace. It is used basically to denote a building in which a family lives (Deut. 20:5) but can also refer to the family or household itself (Gen. 15:2; Josh. 7:14; 24:15). It often is used of a clan such as "house of Aaron" (Ps. 115:10. 12; 118:3). Sometimes it means palace or dynasty when employed in the Hebrew phrase "house of the king" (Gen 12:15; 1 Kgs 4:6; Jer 39:8). When the OT speaks of the house of the Lord, it obviously refers to the Temple or Tabernacle (Exod 23:19; Dan.1:2). The word is also found in place names: Bethel, meaning "house of God" (Gen 12:8).

25, 26, 27, 29), and once a family (v. 18).[77] Polzin argues that "when the History [Deuteronomist] speaks of family, dynasty, tribe, nation, or abode in terms of permanence and continuity, *bayit*, 'house,' comes naturally to mind." It is significant for our purposes that "house" as dynasty is used seven times. Just as Abigail's use of YHWH seven times in her prophetic speech to David is an allusion to Creation, so too is the seven-time use of "house" as dynasty. Guinan notes:

> [An] aspect of the Davidic covenant, not explicit in 2 Samuel 7, can be added. The stability of David's throne is rooted in the order of creation: "…as long as the sun before me. Like the moon, it shall be established forever" (Ps 89:37–38—Eng 36–37)…The Mosaic covenant, with its stress on history and morality, calls Israel to be serious about its covenant life; the covenant is one of human obligation and is precarious. The Davidic covenant stresses creation and the constancy of God; this is a covenant of divine commitment that assures Israel that even though it sins, God's promises can be trusted [78]

In addition, Morrison supposes "when God promises to build a 'house' for David, the discourse shifts momentarily into the third person and the name of the Lord (YHWH) appears twice (11b). After this climax, the word 'forever' (*'ad 'ôlām*) (13) appears seven times, reiterating that God's plan for David is eternal."[79] Furthermore, the use of the keyword "forever" in conjunction with David's house is significant. Polzin observes:

> The frequent appearance in 2 Samuel of 'house' and 'forever' together is scarcely accidental, for this conjunction of words fits the pattern found throughout the rest of Samuel and Kings. When we look at the distribution of 'forever' throughout the rest of these books, the pattern we find there is remarkably similar: the word occurs twenty-three times elsewhere, and nine of these instances are in a context in which either a familial house or the divine temple is mentioned. What these figures suggest is significant: whenever abode, family, tribe, or nation is referred to in Samuel/Kings as 'house,' something of the permanence which may from time to time be affirmed or denied of them is an important focus of this designation. To call an abode, family, tribe, or nation a 'house' is already to call attention to the

[77] Hamilton, *Handbook,* 317.

[78] M. D. Guinan, "Davidic Covenant," in *AYBD* 2, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday,1992), 70-71.

[79] Morrison, *2 Samuel,* 99.

> permanent aspects of such units with respect to the fortunes or misfortunes of time.[80]

Tsumura supposes that God's promises to Abraham to make him a great nation (Gen 12:1-3) and bless the world through his seed (22:18) is "confirmed and made specific by the promise to David that the offspring of David will sit enthroned eternally (2 Sam 7:12-16). Here the Lord promises to make one family, that of David, the representative of his people forever."[81] We have noted that the lives of foundational characters are normative for the biblical people. As such, the metaphor of David's "forever" "house" instituted by YHWH, the living God, linked to the Creation event[82] is symbolic for ongoing life after death for the people of God. The Davidic covenant metaphorically adds the dimension of unconditional ongoing life for those in the family of YHWH.

We shall now turn to the narrative of David and Bathsheba, a that story also contains a "forever" promise for the house of David, this time, as a result of sin. As Bruggeman aptly states: "We do not always understand how God's utter fidelity is to be understood in the midst of the painful breaks that occur in our common experience. God's conditional requirement and God's unconditional promise belong to biblical faith."[83]

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[80] Polzin, *2 Samuel*, 79.

[81] David Toshio Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 115.

[82] Psalm 89 reflects the understanding that God's faithfulness in maintaining Creation is a metaphor for his faithfulness to the throne (house) of David:

> But I will not take away My steadfast love from him; I will not betray My faithfulness.
> 1 will not violate My covenant, or change what I have uttered.
> I have sworn by My holiness, once and for all; I will not be false to David.
> His line shall continue forever, his throne, as the sun before Me,
> as the moon, established forever, an enduring witness in the sky.

[83] Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 259.

5.2.2 A Theology of Death to Life in the Story of David and Bathsheba

The story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11-12 is the pivotal turning point in the life of David. The opening and closing lament in his eulogy for Saul and Jonathan — "how the mighty have fallen" (2 Sam 1:19, 27) — becomes hauntingly descriptive of David himself. Brueggemann asserts:

> If we face this text at all, we are soon invited behind all the critical, scholarly questions to face the harder questions of human desire and human power — desire with all its delight, power with all its potential for death…It is the abrupt transition from life under blessing to a life under curse. It is the sin of David (and Israel) that cuts so sharply that it rivals in power the 'original' act of Adam and Eve. The story is so massive and penetrating that it almost defies our capacity to interpret.[84]

Once again, humankind falls, this time in the guise of a king. Like Adam, God provided David with a "forever" house, echoing Adam's state of immortality before the fall. Adam and David both sin. The stated punishment for their actions is death (Gen 2:17; Deut 22:22). Death indeed enters both of their houses with the death of a son. Abel (Gen 4:8) and the newborn son of David (2 Sam 12:18) both die.[85] The "house" of Adam must live with the promised consequences of sin as does David's. God does not rescind his promise to David of an eternal house. Rather he responds with another "forever" promise: "Therefore the sword shall never depart from your house" (2 Sam 12:10). Hamilton suggests, "the combination of 2 Samuel 7 with 2 Samuel 12 demonstrates that God's 'forevers' can be both salutary and sobering."[86] The "forever" consequences of sin stand in tension with the living God's awesome faithfulness, grace, and love for his people. As such, his

[84] Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 272

[85] Upon hearing Nathan's parable, David exclaims that the man who killed the lamb of the poor man should pay "four times over," thereby sentencing himself. Four of his sons will die (the baby 12:18; Amnon 13:29; Absalom 17:18:14-15; and Adonijah (1 Kgs 2:25). Like Adam, a son of David will murder his brother (2 Sam 13:28-29). In addition, Solomon orders the execution of his brother Adonijah, and in essence, by being responsible for his death, kills him (1 Kgs 2:14).

[86] Hamilton, *Handbook*, 318.

plan for ongoing life after death is embedded metaphorically in the text, for following the deaths of Abel and the infant, Adam and David are both blessed with the birth of another son. Brueggemann observes:

> The placement of Solomon's birth in the narrative is stunning. Solomon is born so close to the sordidness, still within the echo of the prophetic lawsuit. Nonetheless, life begins again for this family. This God has an amazing capacity to work more life at the border of death, to act in promise-keeping ways (cf. 7:12) just when the promise seems exhausted.[87]

Moreover, in the story of David's fall we are granted a further revelation of a theology of death to life not yet realized in the historical narrative; that of repentance leading to forgiveness and ongoing life. When Nathan confronts David with his sin, rather than blame Bathsheba (as Adam and Eve did, casting blame on the other and the serpent, Gen 3:12-13), he acknowledges his sin. Bodner and Johnson argue that the characterization of David in Ps 52 offers an expansion of David's seemly terse confession, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sam 12:13). It "becomes an extended meditation on the nature of sin's infiltration, the theology of sacrifice and atonement and the journey toward restoration."[88] David's simple confession may not seem sufficient evidence of a repentant heart, however God, who sees the hearts of humans acknowledges David's contrition and through Nathan replies: "The LORD has remitted your sin; you shall not die. However, since you have spurned the enemies of the LORD by this deed, even the child about to be born to you shall die" (12:13-14). The understanding that true repentance leads to ongoing life is rooted in this story and contributes to God's revelation of life after death.

[87] Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 284.

[88] Bodner and Johnson, "David," 138, note that in Ps 51, three different Hebrew words for sin is matched by three different words for grace indicate a "resolution to the famous episode of David, Bathsheba and Uriah."

The idea that an atonement must be made for sin is present in the Adam and Eve narrative. An animal had to die in order for God to clothe their nakedness (Gen 3:21). In David's story, it is the child conceived in sin who will die.[89] Yet even in that tragedy, a theology of ongoing life after death may be realized in addition to that of the child conceived to replace him.

True to Nathan's oracle the infant son of David and Bathsheba becomes critically ill. Despite David's entreaties for him, on the seventh day, he dies. David's servants fearing that David may harm himself are reluctant to give him the news.

> David saw his servants talking in whispers, David understood that the child was dead; David asked his servants, "Is the child dead?" "Yes," they replied. Thereupon David rose from the ground; he bathed and anointed himself, and he changed his clothes. He went into the House of the LORD and prostrated himself. Then he went home and asked for food, which they set before him, and he ate. His courtiers asked him, "Why have you acted in this manner? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but now that the child is dead, you rise and take food!" He replied, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept because I thought: 'Who knows? The LORD may have pity on me, and live.' But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will never come back to me." (2 Sam 13:19-23)

David's speech and behavior after the infant dies encompasses one of the clearest passages of a belief in ongoing life after death in the historical books. Upon the death of the child, "David moves quickly from the feeble realm of death to the vitality of life. He dresses, he worships, and he eats" (12:20).[90] This surprising behavior baffles the servants. However, his unexpected words

[89] McCarter, *II Samuel,* 301, argues: "The verb (*he'ebîr*) means more than 'has put away' (RSV). The sin cannot simply be forgotten: It must be atoned for. Thus, if David himself is not to die, the sin must be transferred to someone who will." Tsumura, *2 Samuel,* 170 argues: "A sin must be atoned for by someone. Hence, Nathan's word 'The L ORD also has taken away your sin' (lit. 'to cause your sin to pass over') implies that David's sin will be atoned for by the Lord himself. The perfect verb here is also to be taken as performative with Muraoka, that is, that Nathan's words are the means by which David is absolved of his sin…Certainly, David, the Lord's anointed, does not die now (see Lev 20:10), for his sin was transferred to another person, his son." However, God's forgiveness occurs before the announcement that the child will die. Thus, forgiveness itself comes unconditionally from God. See also Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 373.

[90] Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 283.

and actions speak to a theology of death to life embedded therein. Bergen observes that "even as David's unnamed son was being prepared for burial, David was grooming himself for a new life."[91] David's first actions consisted of purification and worship, the steps that would lead him to God's presence. There, metaphorically David is with his son in God's presence. This was an experience they could not share in this life — David could not bring him back. However, David would go to him in time.[92] There in God's presence, after their deaths, they would be together.[93] There is no hint of Sheol in the text.[94] There is no signal in David's speech that the infant is confined to a shadowy realm, where there is no relationship with God. Rather, David's relationship with God, with its conventual promise of a "forever house" certainly stands behind David's understanding that he and the child would one day be reunited. Jensen supposes that this text "bears witness to a relationship that is not severed even in death. It is, perhaps, what every parent hopes for: a love as strong as death, so that not even death will make a loved one lost forever. Even here, amid the most agonizing loss a parent can imagine, death does not hold the final word."[95]

Commentators differ in their arguments concerning David's unexpected behavior during the seven days prior to the death of the infant. David in effect reverses the order of "standard behavior here: mourning before death, praising God afterward."[96]

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[91] Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 375.

[92] This echoes Samuels's words to Saul concerning him and his sons (2 Sam 1:23) as being together with Samuel after death (1 Sam 28:19).

[93] Joyce Baldwin, *1, 2 Samuel,* TOTC (Grand Rapids: IVP, 2008), 7 ProQuest E-book Central from dtl, ch. 3 writes: "David comes to terms with his own mortality, and even in that finds hope, because he looks forward to being reunited with his child." Similarly, in the account of Saul and the medium at Endor (1 Sam 28), Samuel informs Saul that on the following day, he and his sons "will be with me." Although Samuel's "ghost" is said to be brought up, implying that he was residing in Sheol, the text does not say so. In addition, the texts regarding the death of Samuel, Saul and his sons do not mention that they died and descended into Sheol, the implication being that they are in relationship in some place together following death.

[94] Anderson, *2 Samuel,* 164, mistakenly argues "V. 23 does not necessarily imply that mourning as such is pointless…it only states that at this stage fasting and intercession for the child's restoration (cf. v 16) have served their useful purpose because Sheol is a place of no return." However, Sheol is not mentioned in this narrative nor in the death of David. See ch. 2 regarding Sheol as a destination after death.

[95] David H. Jensen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* TCB (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2015), 227.

[96] Ibid., 227.

Alter suggests that as seven days was the customary period of mourning, "in this instance David enacts a regimen of mourning, in an effort to placate God, before the fact of death."[97]

Bergen and McCarter both suggest that David is not mourning at all. Rather he is pleading with YHWH to spare the life of the child. This seems to agree with David's own explanation for his behavior (12:22-23).[98]

Morrison understands that "David's gestures — fasting and lying on the floor—are acts of penance and atonement."[99] The fact that the baby dies on the seventh day alerts the reader that atonement and purification are David's intent, as this is the prescribed time period for purification according to Lev 13:2-8 (also Num 19:11, which refers to the number of days required to be purified from corpse defilement). David's washing of himself after the child dies "indicates purification after atonement."[100] At any rate, as Alter so aptly notes, David's "acts pointedly replicate those of the man he murdered, who refused to go home and eat, but instead spent the night lying on the ground with the palace guard."[101] By doing so, David is symbolically acknowledging his guilt in bringing about Uriah's death. Perhaps David reasoned self-humiliation and true acknowledgement of his guilt might change the course of events.

Bergen proposes that the child dies on the seventh day and as such is not circumcised. This would preclude him from identifying with the people of the covenant. "David's son was conceived as a result of David's contempt for the Lord's covenant, so it was painfully fitting that the child should be permanently excluded from Israel's covenant community."[102] However, it seems

[97] Alter, *Ancient Israel,* 491. McCarter, *II Samuel,* 301 allows that "David could be said to have complied with the conventions of [mourning] behavior after all, albeit proleptically."
[98] Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 374; McCarter, *II Samuel,* 301.
[99] Morrison, *2 Samuel,* 160-161.
[100] Ibid,.
[101] Alter, *Ancient Israel,* 491.
[102] Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel,* 375. Bergen also argues that this is the reason why the child is not named.

unlikely, and an overstatement by Bergen to assume such an exclusion of an innocent infant.[103] In addition, the text is unclear about the age of the child when he became ill. Nathan declares "the child [who is] born (hay-yil-lō-wḏ*)* to you shall die" (12:14). In v. 15 we learn that "the child that Uriah's wife bore (yā-lə-ḏāh) became ill." Bergen's interpretation would hold true only if the baby was born on the day of the oracle.[104]

There are certainly elements of mourning and purification and their association with a seven-day period in the text. However, David himself explains to his servants that his behavior was not mourning, but in essence a last-ditch appeal to YHWH to change his mind and allow the child to live (12:22). His words imply that his behavior was not going to change until the child recovered or died, regardless of the length of his illness. The text does not hint that David ended his mourning because a seven-day period had been completed. Rather, it ended with the death of the child, specifically *on the seventh day* after the onset of his illness. Perhaps in this instance, in addition to understanding the child's death on the seventh day as referring to mourning and purification rituals, a third allusion may also exist. It is possible that the biblical writer is linking the death of the child on the seventh day to the seventh day of Creation, thereby metaphorically embedding a theology of death to life in the narrative. As such, the symbolic significance of the seventh day may infuse the death of the child with added theological meaning.

On the seventh day, God, having finished creating life, rested (*shabbath*)[105] from his labor and declared that day as holy or set apart (Gen 2:3). His people were to remember that day and

[103] Ps 139:13-18 expresses God's faithful care of the unborn child. What is more, after the child dies, David expresses that he will go to the child upon his own death, and David, who actually committed the sin, was not relieved of his covenant status.

[104] However, according to McCarter, *II Samuel,* 301, "There is nothing in the text to support [the]… assumption that the seventh day mentioned in v 18 was the seventh day of the child's life."

[105] As Sarna, *Genesis,* 14 argues, "The human institution of the Sabbath does not appear in the narrative. Indeed, the Hebrew noun *shabbat* is absent, and we have only the verbal forms of the root…Nevertheless, there cannot be any doubt that the text provides the unspoken foundation for the future institution of the Sabbath."

keep it holy — to enjoy relationship with YHWH. That is, the seventh day, which would come to be called the Sabbath, was a day of rest (*núakh)*; a day to celebrate the relationship of the people to YHWH who created life (Exod 20:8-11). The life of the child was completed, and on the seventh day he entered his Sabbath rest. Sarna notes, "the seventh day is in polar contrast to the other six days, which are filled with creative activity. Its distinctive character is its desistance from labor and its infusion with blessing and sanctity."[106] Forgiveness, purification and atonement had taken place for the child. A relationship with God ensured. Perhaps his death on the seventh day is a symbolic message, embedded in the story of his death, that the child lives on in Sabbath relationship with YHWH.

The story of David and Bathsheba is a tale that causes one to reflect on one's vulnerabilities. We will all fall into sin, no matter how we try to avoid it. But this story also offers hope. God has revealed more clearly that despite the consequences, he will forgive the sin of the repentant, unconditionally. What is more, the death of the child on the seventh day and the immediate birth of another son symbolize the hope of relationship and ongoing life with God and others after our death. Tsumura observes:

> It should be noted that his attitude toward the death of his beloved one is completely the opposite of that of the Canaanite cult of the dead. While in the latter family members intercede and appeal to their deities to "save" the soul of the dead, David, while the child was alive, sought God's mercy for his recovery, but, after his death, he entrusted the fate of the dead child completely to the hands of the sovereign and merciful God. David's behavior has nothing to do with a Canaanite cult of the dead, in which even the chief deity El had to depend on divination to heal the dying king Keret. Here, we may catch a glimpse of the fact that David was a realistic monotheist, trusting on the only God.[107]

[106] Sarna, *Genesis*, 14.
[107] Tsumura, *2 Samuel,* 175.

5.3 A Theology of Death to Life in the Death of David

The story of David's final days is one of dismay; a sad end to a glorious beginning. Although David will never lose the promise of a "forever house," his final days are plagued by the "forever sword" that was his due. Unlike Moses, who was potent, clear sighted and active until his death, David does not "know" the beautiful virgin who warms his aging bones (1 Kgs 1:4), nor does he see his kingdom disintegrating around him, for as his sons vie for the throne, he lies meekly shivering in his bed (1:5-27). God through the agencies of Nathan and Bathsheba ensure Solomon's succession to the throne (1:28-40) at the cost of yet another son of David (2:30). Solomon, whom the LORD favored (2 Sam 12:25), will become king, continuing the house of David through the son of God's choice.

However, as Wolff aptly suggests: "The Deuteronomic history also shows from the words of the dying…David (1 Kgs 2:1ff.) how man in his frailty becomes a witness of authority when he stands at the threshold of death."[108] House observes that the sequence of David's speech to Solomon includes two parts, the order of which "should be understood as significant, since the second without the first would be useless."[109] In the first part David admonishes Solomon to follow the teachings of Moses. He begins with the phrase "I am going the way of all the earth" (2:2).[110] Like his ancestors before him he will die. David knows that the end is near, hence his dying words are important for the living, "for the biblical narrators report men's dying words with much more attention than the act of dying."[111]

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[108] Wolff, *Anthropology,* 100.

[109] Paul House, *1, 2 Kings,* NAC 8 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 96.

[110] Wolff, *Anthropology,* 99 notes that these words were also spoken by Joshua on his deathbed (Josh 23:14). To "go the way of all the earth," in the HB appears to be associated with a "natural death." See fn. 119.

[111] Ibid,.

The second part of David's speech includes actions by which Solomon can secure his kingdom. His request for his son to "deal graciously" with Barzillai for his support against Absalom (1 Kgs 2:7) is sandwiched between his desire for Solomon to right the wrongs done to him by Joab and Shimei. Solomon is to see that Joab's "white hair does not go down to *Sheol* in *peace* for shedding the blood of Abner and Amasa during *peacetime*" (2:5-6). Joab will lose his peaceful death as an old (whitehaired) man, and will be executed; struck down in the Tent of the LORD (2:24). However, he will receive a proper burial, and as such will symbolically be in relationship with his ancestors (2:25). Shimei, who has not shed blood, is skillfully manipulated by the wise Solomon into committing an act that will call for the shedding of his own blood (2:26-46). He does not receive a burial. Ironically, David's last words concerning Shimei, "send his grey hair down to Sheol in blood" (2:9), also reflect David's final days. Because of the shedding of innocent blood, David's life has been one that may be described as existing in *Sheol*. We have seen that people who experience peril and distress are said to be in *Sheol*, even though they are not dead[112] Psalm 18:3-6 records an earlier time in his life, after God had rescued him from Saul, when David experienced Sheol:

> Ropes of death encompassed me;
> Torrents of Belial [destruction] terrified me;
> Ropes of *Sheol* encircles me;
> Snares of Death confronted me.
> In my distress I called on the LORD,
> Cried out to my God:
> In His temple He heard my voice;
> My cry to Him reached His ears.

[112]Johnston, *Shades of Sheol,* 83. Sheol is "almost exclusively reserved for those under divine judgment." See ch. 2 for a discussion on Sheol. In the instance of Joab and Shimei, the language of David's request toward each of them is very different. Joab should not die peacefully, for an unpeaceful death is characteristic in the use of Sheol. Joab is not to have the privilege of a natural death. Shimei, on the other hand, is to be "sent to Sheol in blood." The fact that he is sent in blood, and not buried may suggest that he is not in the presence of God or one of the unrighteous dead whose ultimate destiny is *Sheol*. His actions and insults against David were acts against God as well.

When David dies, he is not said to descend to *Sheol*, rather he is rescued from his self-inflicted *Sheol* to rest eternally with his fathers. This belief is reflected in the Ps 16:9-11:

> So my heart rejoices,
> My whole being exults,
> And my body rests secure.
> For You will not abandon me to *Sheol*,
> Or let your faithful one see the Pit
> You will teach me the path of life,
> In your presence is perfect joy;
> Delights are ever in your right hand.

We have seen that the language associated with the actual deaths of the patriarchs contained a reference to the age of the person, some form of "breathed their last," being "gathered to their kin," and a proper burial by their son(s). Moses, Aaron and the first generation that entered the land were all said to be "gathered to their fathers." We have proposed that death language including the last breath — an echo of the breath of life given by God in order to animate man, the gathering of those who have passed suggesting an ongoing community, and burial by sons, are all speech that metaphorically points to ongoing life after death.[113] The words used to describe the death of David consist of a new language that contains important echoes from the past which infuse it with meaning and understanding for the future.

As with most biblical characters, David's actual death is reported succinctly. Therefore, the minimal number of words used alert the reader to look carefully for their meaning.

> So David slept (*šākab*) with his fathers, and he was buried in the City of David. The length of David's reign was forty years: he reigned seven years in Hebron, and he reigned thirty-three years in Jerusalem. And Solomon sat upon the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.[114] (1 Kgs 2:1-12)

[113] See ch. 3 on *Sheol*.

[114] Matthew J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel* (Tübingen: Mohr Seibeck, 2010), proposes that the expression "lay with one's fathers" with its accompanying

David is said to be lying (*šākab*) with his fathers prior to his burial. This implies an ongoing relationship in the afterlife with his ancestors upon death just as in the death narratives of the patriarchs and Moses who were "gathered to their fathers" before burial.

The description of David's death includes the first occurrence of "resting" or "lying" (*šākab*) with one's fathers or ancestors in an actual death narrative. However, *šākab* was used in the narrative of two illustrious ancestors in discussions of their impending deaths. Jacob implores Joseph not to bury him in Egypt, saying, "When I lie down (*šākab*) with my fathers, take me up from Egypt" (Gen 47:30). Shortly before his death, God informs Moses, "You are soon to lie with (*šākab*) your fathers" (Deut 31:16). As such, this word links the death of David with those of Jacob and Moses, and the theology of ongoing life in their stories.[115] At the same time, going forward, this new death language will apply to the deaths of all of the kings of Israel and Judah who die a natural death; that is "go the way of all the world" as David did. This death language consists of the deceased king lying, sleeping or resting (*šākab*) with the fathers/ancestors, the place of burial, and the name of the successor.[116] Kings that die an unnatural death, such as by assassination, suicide or death in battle,[117] are not said to "lie" (*šākab*) with their ancestors,

statements in the royal death narratives actually serves as a scribal formula for dynastic succession, in particular, to ensure the primacy of the Davidic line. Whereas this is true to the extent that it was useful language in establishing succession, Suriano's theory lacks any sort of theological understanding of the language.

[115] Walter A. Maier III, *1 Kings 1-11: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture,* CCV, ed. Christopher W. Mitchel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018), 267. Maier notes that in addition, the same phraseology found in 2:1, "the days of David drew near to die" is also used for in reference to the approaching deaths of Jacob (Gen 47:29) and Moses (Deut 31:14).

[116] The length of their reign is noted at the beginning of their tenure. A notation of the recording of the exploits of the king is sometimes noted as well.

[117] This includes the righteous Josiah, who dies in battle (2 Kgs 23:29). Kings of Judah who are not said to rest with their fathers include: Ahaziah, killed in battle (2 Kgs 27-28); Queen Athaliah, executed (11:16); Joash, assassinated (12:20); Amon, assassinated (21:23); Zechariah, assassinated (15:10); Jehoahaz, died in Egypt (23:34). Kings of Israel: Shallum, assassinated (1 Kgs 15:14); Nadab, assassinated (15:28); Elah, assassinated (16:10); Zimri, suicide by fire (16:18); Ahaziah, injury from a fall (2 Kgs 1:2, 17); Pekahiah, assassinated (15:25); Pekah, assassinated (15:30).

although many receive a proper burial.[118] Wolff observes that by prefacing his deathbed speech with "going the way of all the earth," David is verbalizing acceptance of his death. This phraseology carries with it the understanding that a natural death "ends a life that has been fulfilled…Premature death, however, always manifests itself as the enemy of life."[119] As such, the deaths of kings who die prematurely are metaphorically in opposition to YHWH, the God of life. Therefore, this new death language is not applied to them. The phraseology has to do with dying after a full life — an important element of a good death in the HB — not with the righteousness of the deceased. Therefore, it reflects God's character as the living God and his intent for ongoing life, rather than a denial of an afterlife for those who are not said to lie with the fathers.

The introduction of the language of lying/sleeping/resting with the ancestors adds to the understanding of a theology of life after death, for as Maier aptly supposes, "a person's lying down can carry with it the thought of his 'getting up' again. When one rests or sleeps, he will be roused once more to action…'he lay down with his fathers' implies resurrection from the dead."[120] The phrase "he went to sleep" for death in the NT understands death as a temporary sleep for the body, continuing until one is resurrected (1 Thess 4:13-18). The beginning of a new language in the death of King David that offers the hope of resurrection is a key development in realizing a theology of death to ongoing life in the stories of the HB.

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[118] Ahab is an exception. He dies in battle, lies (*šākab*) with his ancestors and receives a proper burial (1 Kgs 22:37, 40). Many notoriously evil kings, who die a natural death, are said to lie (*šākab*) with the fathers and receive proper burials; e.g., Jeroboam (1 Kgs 14:20) and Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:18).

[119] Wolff, *Anthropology,* 112-13. Wolff notes "The OT reminds us rather that to die satisfied with life belongs to man's *Nature as a created being*...The death penalty threatened in 2:17 for the grasp at the tree of knowledge is not carried out…It is subsequently stressed in 3:22 that 'living forever' is for God, not for man…hence access to the tree of life is denied" (115). That is to say that Adam and Eve lived a full life and did not suffer premature death. This was God's plan after the fall.

[120] Maier, *1 Kings 1-11,* 292.

5.4 Summary

The story of King David contains elements of a theology of death to life found in the narratives of his ancestors. Furthermore, the accounts of his life and death disclose additional revelations of God's plan for life after death for his people.

During David's rise to the throne, his encounters with Goliath and Abigail both speak to a theology of death to life. In David's first speech, prior to his battle with Goliath he refers to YHWH as the "living God." He will repeat this epithet twice more. David, filled with the spirit, alerts the army that they are indeed the ranks of the living God who reigns supreme over life and death, and as such, it is Goliath who should be afraid and not David or the troops. The prophetic utterances of Abigail foreshadow David's "forever house" as well as metaphorically hinting at eternal life. In both stories, life is snatched from the jaws of death through those who are obedient to YHWH.

The Davidic covenant with its roots is the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants, and the keywords "LORD", "house" and "forever," add new language to a theology of death to life embedded in the story and will ultimately give rise to the messianic hope. In addition, the concept of unconditionality in the covenant adds fuller meaning to God's grace. Despite the sin of David and Bathsheba, we see an ongoing theology of life after death in David's words "I will go to him," that imply an existence and relationship in the afterlife. The birth of Solomon immediately following the death of the infant metaphorically symbolizes life after death. God does not revoke his promise of a "forever house" after David sins. Rather, God grants unconditional forgiveness to a repentant heart. "Sin will bring punishment, but the last word is with God's grace."[121]

[121] Guinan, "Davidic Covenant," 70.

David rallies for his powerful deathbed charge to Solomon. He is "going the way of all the earth." However, the new language used to describe David's death speaks metaphorically to the resurrection from the dead, for those who "lie down" will rise up again. The story of King David and the promise of his "forever house" adds deeper meaning to a theology of life after death embedded within the stories in the HB. It is from this narrative the messianic hope will arise that will be fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of God.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

One may diligently search the NT Scriptures for the term "Trinity," and never find it. It is simply not there. The technical language of the Trinity was not developed until the fourth century.[1] However, embedded in the NT texts is a very clear doctrine of the Trinity that "is foundational to Christian theology."[2] The understanding of God as a trinitarian God is much less clear in the OT. However, we know that God did not "become" a trinitarian God in the NT. He was always so. In the same way, we have proposed that the HB does indeed contain a robust theology of life after death embedded within the stories of its foundational characters. In addition, just as further understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity and the familiar language to express it developed over time, the same holds true for the resurrection unto eternal life and its unfolding and linguistic development.

In this work we examined several OT biblical narratives in an attempt to discover what, if anything, the HB — particularly the historical books —has to say concerning death and a theology of an afterlife. A theology of eternal life after death is very clear in the NT. It is communicated using language and concepts provided by the finished work of Jesus Christ. It is our contention, however, that the assurance of ongoing life in the presence of God was just as important to the

[1]Brandon D. Crowe and Carl R. Trueman, *The Essential Trinity: New Testament Foundations and Practical Relevance*, eds. Brandon D. Crowe and Carl R. Trueman (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2016), 19; see this work, for a survey of Trinitarian texts

[2] Ibid., 19. Crowe and Trueman note that "unfortunately it is not uncommon to encounter the view the Trinity is a non-biblical doctrine…that arose only on the basis of later philosophical speculation…However historically, in the Christian church the Trinity has been understood to be a robustly biblical doctrine with immense relevance for practical living."

ancient Hebrew people as it is to the church today. As such, God would have communicated it in his Word. Barr aptly observes:

> In the structure of biblical ideas immortality does not come in at the margin, at the latest point, or through the intrusion of Greek philosophy. It is present at least as an idea, at the earliest stages, and is a force that thereby has an effect on much of the thought of later times." [3]

We have demonstrated that God progressively communicated this truth in the HB through the stories of his interactions with his people in history. The narratives of the foundational ancestors contain truths about God that have been skillfully embedded within the text by the biblical writers and understood by the readers and hearers of those texts. To the patriarchs, God's name was *El Shaddai,* a name associated with fertility and life. To Moses, God revealed himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a name that Jesus taught as suggestive of ongoing relationship after death. God further identified himself as YHWH — to be, living. This was to be his name forever. All God's revelations of his name were concerned with ongoing, vibrant life. Gordon Fee aptly notes, "whatever else may be said about God in the OT, the main reality about him, which is revealed even in his name, is that YHWH is the living and life-giving God."[4] As such, his very nature is characterized by life and love for his people that cannot be conquered by death.

The emergence of literary studies in biblical scholarship has contributed greatly to our ability to discern a theology of death to life in the HB. The study of the poetics and structure of the text — the manner in which the stories are communicated — have enabled us to move beyond the emphasis on source and historical criticism in order to find meaning in Scripture as it is written.

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[3] Barr, *Garden of Eden,* 14-15.
[4] Fee, *Paul, The Spirit,* 92.

The HB presents itself as the testament of the living God; his revelation of himself through his mighty acts in the lives of his people. This is our starting point for realizing a theology of life after death in the OT.

Our hope is that our findings will offer comfort and further assurance for the church, that God intends for his people to live for all eternity with him. In fact, it has been his plan from the beginning, and when one looks for it, a theology of death to life is everywhere embedded in the text. Life will always trump death for our God is the God of the living, not the dead.

6.1 Contributions of the Study

We have noted that comparative studies have limited value for understanding the thanatology of the ancient Hebrews. Scholarship has been quick to assume that similar practices imply shared meaning. A theological interpretation of the data and text, however, provides the opportunity to understand these practices from the viewpoint of Israel as the valued people of the living God, who created, provided, cared for, and dwelled with them. As such, their relationship with the God of the living does not end at death. In addition, it is important to take note of the differences as well as the similarities of the practices surrounding Hebrew death and post mortem care compared to that of the neighboring cultures. The disinterestedness concerning death is a prime example of an important difference. The relative dearth of thanatological material in the HB implies that the focus of the Hebrews was on life because they worshipped a God whose name was life. By deemphasizing and demythologizing death, the biblical writers were able to distance themselves from the pagan nations as well as embed a theology of ongoing life into its writings. Another important area of difference is found in the Judahite burial practices. Tombs that share the same floorplan as the Israelite house and the care of bones which do not decay are both metaphors for ongoing life after death.

It is also worth keeping in mind the fact that the biblical people understood things from the standpoint of its function rather than how it looked. As such, abstract concepts were largely communicated concretely through metaphor, often involving human body parts. This enables a theology of death to life to be expressed metaphorically in story. For example, Rachel's death in childbirth is a metaphor for ongoing life after death. Her death resulted in new life.

Furthermore, we have demonstrated that holistic anthropology when viewed as functional rather than monistic, along with a proper understanding of *nepeš* in the context in which it is used to mean "soul," or as Barr has termed it, "control center," both contribute to the possibility of an afterlife that has been largely denied by OT scholarship.

Unlike the writings of the surrounding ANE nations, the HB is not overly concerned with death or the underworld. Death narratives are short; however, they are worded in such a manner as to convey ongoing life after death. Natural death in the biblical world, when it occurred at a ripe old age, was a normal part of life. There is no hint in the text that such a death is something to be feared or avoided. However, premature or violent death was frightening. Such a fate is filled with terrifying anguish. This is *Sheol*, a death seen "as a bitter enemy of life" (Ps 55:4).[5] We have shown that the concept of *Sheol*, unique to the biblical people, is seen as the ultimate fate of the unrighteous (Num 16:30, 33) or a period of extreme trial for the righteous (Gen 37:35). It is not synonymous with the pagan idea of the underworld, rather the HB was able to infuse the term with unique theological meaning. We agree that *Sheol* is not to be understood as the destination of all humankind. Rather, natural deaths in the HB are peaceful and accepted, for God's people were aware that death will lead to ongoing life and relationship with God and the ancestors.

[5] Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 28. This is evident in our study of *Sheol* as well as in the death narrative of David, when he states "I am going the way of all the earth" (2 Kgs 2:2).

The story of Rachel has much to offer toward realizing a theology of death to life in the OT. The text provides skillfully embedded hints of her impending death, all communicated through speech; two by Rachel, followed by the final declaration of Jacob. The words biblical writers place on the lips of the characters are often overlooked in regard to the theological meaning they convey. The works of Alter, Amit, Bar-Efrat, Fokkelman, Polzin and others have alerted scholarship to the importance of a character's speech and its context for conveying meaning in the text. We have found that such literary practices reveal theological truth in the stories of all three characters studied in this work.

At the same time, carefully woven into the narrative portions of Rachel's story are three illusions to life after death. In these instances, the writer utilizes a name of God, echoes of fertility, pillar imagery, structure, keywords and other literary techniques to symbolize ongoing life after the death of Rachel.

Moses' story is one that that begins with the blessings of life and fertility prior to his birth. The birth narrative of Moses is infused with death to life irony[6] and the presence of six women, who succeed in enabling Moses to transition from one life to the next (a metaphor for childbirth). His story also alerts us that the use of keywords and repetition are methods used by the biblical writers to communicate theologically. Repetitions, rather than simply reflecting the use of various sources, may serve to develop a theology of ongoing life. Moses' story also illustrates that the names of God contribute to our proposed theology.

The death language "gathered to his people," has been understood by many scholars as referring to the practice of secondary burial. After the body of a deceased individual decomposes, the bones are "gathered" into a corner of the tomb or ossuary in order to make room for a

[6] For example, the watery grave Pharoah had in mind for the Hebrew infants became the fate of his own army.

subsequent burial. However, we have noted that the process of gathering is always referred to as occurring *before* the actual burial of the individual. As such, it cannot refer to secondary burial. Rather, the gathering of bones is a metaphor for the gathering of the *nešāmā* — that God-breathed life force (closely associated with *ru'ah* and *nepeš*) — of the deceased, to God and those who are already dead. This language, used only in the deaths of a righteous few, whose lives as foundational characters are normative for the biblical people, is indicative of an existence after death.

We have proposed that the burial of Moses by God speaks to a theology of life after death in two ways. First, the absence of an observable corpse of one who is said to have died is unique to Moses in the HB. Metaphorically, he will not see the decay that is associated with death. Second, Moses' burial by God forms an inclusio with the creation of humankind in Gen 2. God forms man from the dust of the earth and animates him with his breath. At his death, Moses dies at God's command and God returns him to the dust. Moses' death imagines the creation of humankind in reverse: the life force returns to God and the body to dust. Encased within this inclusio is the story of the metaphorical birth of the people of the living, faithful God.

The story of King David, the man after God's heart who becomes the standard by which every future king will be measured, contributes to the theology of life after death by providing further revelation and clarity of God's plan for everlasting life for his people. David is the first person who is said to be continuously filled with the Spirit of God. Shortly thereafter David utters his initial words, identifying the army as the ranks of the living God. David's defeat of Goliath illustrates God's power to save the lives of his people, that they may live on, despite what appears to be insurmountable odds. Goliath, an instrument of death, is himself destroyed.

David's encounter with Abigail realizes a theology of ongoing life when God uses her quick (*māhar*) actions to save life by preventing David from avenging her husband's foolishness.

The keyword "quick" (*māhar*) links Abigail to Abraham, Sarah, Rebekah, and Joseph and the theology of life after death embedded in their stories using the word *māhar.*

The Davidic covenant contains further revelation of a theology of life after death. It is from the unconditional, "forever house" promised to David by YHWH, that messianic hope springs. When David sins, the promise is not revoked. Rather, it is revealed that a repentant heart will be forgiven and relationship with God restored forever. David mourns while his infant son lay dying. However, he ends his mourning and worships after the child dies, expressing the certainty that he will "go to him," a clear expectation of ongoing relationship after death.

Finally, the death language associated with David's death contains terminology used in a death narrative for the first time in the HB. An initial event or change in the story of a foundational character in Scripture is always significant, and as such is worthy of note. David "rested/lie down" (*šākab*) with his fathers, and was buried. This phraseology will become the royal death language for all kings who die naturally. There are only two other instances of *šākab* to denote death in the HB, neither of which occur in an actual death. Jacob refers to his own death using this terminology and God uses it when informing Moses that he was soon to die. As such, the death of David is linked to the patriarchs and Moses and the covenantal promises they received. Looking forward, it is in these words, the hope of a resurrection is realized, for David is not said to have died, but to rest or lie with his ancestors. Those who lie down to sleep will surely get up, resurrected for eternity with the living God and the community of ancestors.

6.2 Further Areas of Study

We have explored the Rachel story as well as the many women who ensured the life of Moses and concluded that women, by nature of their role as child bearer, a metaphor illustrating the passage from one existence to another, symbolically speak to a theology of ongoing life after death. Often

in biblical studies, the stories of women characters are subordinated or absorbed into the narratives of men. And yet time and again, we see resourceful women in the HB, using whatever means available, act to ensure ongoing life by preventing death or giving birth. We have alluded to the contributions of the other matriarchs as sources for a theology of life after death. However, we have only scratched the surface of the material to be found there in our study. In addition, the stories of other female characters warrant attention. For example: Tamar (Gen 38); Zipporah and the story of the bridegroom of blood (Exod 4:24-26); the wise woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14) and the wise woman of Abel (2 Sam 20), to name a few, all contain elements of a theology of death to life worthy of study.

The Passover event in and of itself is a story of death to life from start to finish and as such is in need of further study for what it teaches concerning a theology of life after death. The book of Ruth contains several characters, each of whom exhibit a theology of life after death. A study of their stories and their impact on the overarching message of death to life in the book as a whole, is another area ripe for study.

A study of the Law of Moses, the law of life, most certainly contains many illusions to life after death, providing ample material for determining a theology of an afterlife. In Luke 10 an expert in the law seeks to test Jesus by asking, "What must I *do* to inherit eternal life?" (v. 25 TNIV). Jesus replies "What is written in the Law? *How do you read it*?" (v. 26). The expert answers, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and Love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 27). "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "*Do this and you will live"* (v. 29). Jesus has interpreted obedience to the *doing* of Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18 as the path to eternal life which ultimately leads to him. And the understanding of that had to do with *how one reads it*! There is tremendous opportunity for

realizing further evidence of a theology of life after death, embedded within the historical books of the HB.

Another area for research may be found in the study of NT narratives that reflect an understanding of an OT belief in life after death. For example, the raising of Lazarus contains several echoes of death to life in the HB (i.e., the binding of Isaac, Jesus's use of the *egō eime*, and the cave tomb). A study of the epistles and Revelation may also yield fresh insights.

As mentioned above, the contribution of literary studies toward finding meaning in the texts of the HB is invaluable. It is by reading the text carefully, while applying cultural, archaeological, historical, and sociological data through a theological lens — one that views the text as the inspired record of the living God in history —that a clear theology of life after death in the OT may be realized. The HB is written in prose. Theology is woven into the story waiting to be discovered. Therefore, we must not expect to see the clear, life after death language we find in the NT in the historical texts of the OT. We must discover it in the story, just as Jesus did. It is essential to break free from the skepticism and pre-conceived notions that YHWH, whose very name means life, did not include such a theology in his revelatory word, simply because it is expressed in a different way. Rather, we should approach the text as we have it, as what it claims to be, as stories of God's revelation of himself. By so doing we will find a vibrant theology of death to life in the OT story.

6.3 Implications for the Church

The idea for this project took shape during my many years of Hospice Nursing experience. Close and frequent encounters with death are enlightening in a way that words cannot convey. God's presence at death is often palpable. He works till the end. Time and again we have seen and felt God's awesome, mighty presence during the dying process as he works, teaches, comforts,

convicts, enables, enlightens and evangelizes during the dying process. Dying is powerful, profound, and important to God (Ps 116:15).

These truths were experienced by the biblical people in a way that we often do not allow ourselves today. Death was all around them. They lived in a world with a high infant mortality rate and shorter lifespans. Yet they worshipped the eternal God whose name means life. As such, we wrestled with the notion that the people of the living God had no notion of ongoing life after death in his presence. It seemed incongruous that God, who created and greatly valued life and relationship with his people, would plan for that to cease at death. Then, while reading the narrative of Jesus and the Sadducees, we realized that it was incompatible to him as well. Jesus revealed the truth of ongoing life after death as clearly embedded in story. "You don't know the Scriptures," Jesus told them. Trusting that there was more than one story that proclaimed a theology of death to life in the HB, we commenced this project.

We have seen that the language associated with a good death in the HB was that of community. Sons buried fathers, who were gathered to ancestors. Kings lied down with their fathers. Burial in the family tomb was important and meaningful. We have also noted that the identity of the biblical people was defined by the presence of God. These two factors of ongoing relationship after death and God's presence speak to a theology of life after death that is reflected in the NT. Paul exhorted the Philippians "as *citizens of heaven* live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ…striving together with one accord" (Phil 1:27 TNIV). He indicates that the community of believers on earth will continue as that community in heaven. To the penitent thief on the cross Jesus proclaimed, "today you will be *with me* in paradise" (Luke 23:43 TNIV). That is, in death, the thief will be in the presence of God.

By his very nature, God does not abandon us as we near death. Rather, it has been our experience that his presence increases, making us more attuned to him, for he does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). We can trust him to act in ways we cannot imagine. The presence of this hope in the OT is vitally important for the church today. The idea that God did not plan for eternal life for those who died before Christ is troubling to many in the church, and will often lead parishioners to forsake the HB all together. However, the OT Scriptures have much to teach us about our God, and as such should not be neglected by the church. We can rely on the fact that the God of the living does not change and that the foundational truth of life after death embedded in the stories of the HB has been realized in the death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. We can rest assured that eternal life in his presence is, and always was, his hope, as well as our own.

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